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CAKES AND ALE

AT WOODBINE;

FROM TWELFTH NIGHT TO NEW YEAR'S DAY.

BY

BARRY GRAY.

Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?" — *Sir Toby Belch*, in "*Twelfth Night.*"

NEW YORK
G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
27 AND 29 WEST 23D ST.
1883

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TO

WILLIAM SUTPHEN,

THIS

COMPLETE EDITION

OF

MY WORKS, VIZ:

VOL. I. MY MARRIED LIFE AT HILLSIDE. *Illustrated.*
" 2. MATRIMONIAL INFELICITIES.
" 3. OUT OF TOWN. *Illustrated.*
" 4. CAKES AND ALE AT WOODBINE, *and*
" 5. CASTLES IN THE AIR.

IS INSCRIBED BY HIS FRIEND,

BARRY GRAY.

December, 1882.

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To

JOSEPH B. TAYLOR,

A TRUE MAN AND A WARM FRIEND,

IN MEMORY OF MANY PLEASANT GATHERINGS AROUND
THE FESTIVE BOARD,

This Book,

TRUSTING THAT ITS

CAKES,

TO QUOTE A COMMON SAYING, MAY NOT PROVE TO BE ALL DOUGH
NOR ITS

ALE

EVER GROW STALE,

IS INSCRIBED

WITH THE KIND REGARDS OF

THE AUTHOR.

WOODBINE COTTAGE, *Fordham, N. Y.*

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To

THE MEMORY OF

HIM

TO WHOM IN LIFE WAS INSCRIBED

This Book,

BUT WHO PASSED FROM EARTH BEFORE ITS PUBLICATION.

IT IS NOW, IN DEATH,

SORROWFULLY REDEDICATED.

FORDHAM, N. Y., *January* 10, 1868

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Opening Chorus	7
II.	We go a-Skating	15
III.	Young Love	24
IV.	We Cut a Pie	30
V.	The Professor	34
VI.	A Cuckoo Clock is Heard	40
VII.	The Professor makes a Gombo	46
VIII.	Sleigh-Riding	54
IX.	The Kettle and the Clock	59
X.	An Old Story, with Slippers for Luck	65
XI.	Eggs, Historical and Fresh	70
XII.	Spring-Time Fancies	76
XIII.	Cakes and Ale of Youth	80
XIV.	An Old-Fashioned Country-House	86
XV.	The Cream of the Joke	92
XVI.	Bitter Chérries	97
XVII.	Preparations for the "Fourth"	102
XVIII.	The Fourth of July	107
XIX.	Brawling Brook	113
XX.	The Devonshire Loose	118
XXI.	Snakes in the Grass	124
XXII.	The Past and the Present	129
XXIII.	How will it end?	134
XXIV.	What came of it	140
XXV.	The Story finished	145
XXVI.	All about a New Bonnet	150
XXVII.	Bonney comes home	154
XXVIII.	Aunt Sally	159
XXIX.	Picnicking	166

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CHAPTER		PAGE
XXX.	St. Thomas's Day	175
XXXI.	Christmas	182
XXXII.	A Christmas Story	189
XXXIII.	The Story for Christmas	199
XXXIV.	Jeannie's Wedding	212
XXXV.	Seeing the Old Year out	216
XXXVI.	New-Year's Day	219

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CAKES AND ALE.

CHAPTER I.

THE OPENING CHORUS.

"NOTHING can be better," I said, taking my favorite position on the rug before the blazing fire on the hearth, — "nothing can be better," I repeated, placing one hand into my waistcoat, and looking mildly around upon my little auditory, "than" —

"Children," my wife interrupted me by saying, "close your books, and be attentive; your father is about to give us his usual after-dinner lecture."

"Nonsense, my dear," I said; "I was only going to remark" —

"Jeannie," my wife broke in, addressing her sister, "will you please hand me that skein of white floss?"

"To remark," I repeated, "that nothing can be better than Twelfth Night."

"Except Christmas," said my wife.

"And New Year's Day, when we receive calls," exclaimed Jeannie.

"And Thanksgiving Day," said Emma, our eldest daughter, who has a wholesome tooth in her head for turkeys and tarts.

"And Fourth of July," chimed in the boy, who is anxious to become the owner of a pistol.

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"And my birthday," lisped the little girl, who has an eye to a forthcoming wax-doll.

"And ta-ta," — whatever that may be, — chirped the youngling of the flock, toddling up to me and placing his chubby little fist in my hand.

"Well, yes," I said; "I meant, of course, with these exceptions. Twelfth Day being the twelfth after Christmas," I continued, "appropriately winds up, with its cakes and ale, the holiday festivities. It is as old, too, as Christmas, and is celebrated in the Christian Church as the festival of the Epiphany. It commemorates the manifestation of our Saviour to the Gentiles, and the name, which signifies an appearance from above, was given to it in allusion to the Star in the East. We even discover in the Saturnalia of the Romans, revels which are almost identical with those of Twelfth Night. It is to be regretted, my dear, that we should be so neglectful of the celebration of this day. As a holiday, it is scarcely remembered among us, though in England it is still carefully observed, and the pastry-cooks' shops on this night are crowded with cakes, ornamented with many quaint and dainty devices. The Twelfth Night cake is an institution, which, even in this country, should not be allowed to crumble to pieces. Then, too, there is the accompanying wassail-bowl, filled with spiced ale, and which, notwithstanding it has been deeply drained since Christmas Eve first made its appearance, is now again brimming full, waiting to be quaffed by Twelfth Night kings and queens, and all their courts. Come, my dear, let us keep this Twelfth Night vigil, and have a huge cake, stuffed with raisins and currants and citron, and covered with a thick white frosting of sugar, and decorated with all manner of pretty images in confectionery."

The children all cried "Yes," to this, and clapped their hands in approval.

"And let us have, too," I continued, "a wassail-bowl, and sing, —

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'To the swinging sup
Of the wassail-cup,
With its toasted health and wishes.' "

"By the by," asked my wife, "what is a wassail-cup?"

"The word wassail, my dear," I said, glad of the opportunity — at least Jeannie said I was — to display my erudition, "is derived from the Saxon, *was-haile*, and was used in ancient times when drinking another's health. The wassail-bowl is undoubtedly Shakespeare's gossips'-bowl, spoken of in the 'Midsummer Night's Dream.' It is composed of ale, mingled with nutmeg, ginger, sugar, toast, and roasted crabs."

"Roasted crabs!" echoed my wife. "It is bad enough without such creatures swimming in it; and I should leave those out, at all events."

"The roasted crabs referred to, my dear," I explained, "are crab-apples, and not those lively chaps that travel sideways."

"Oh!" exclaimed my wife.

"Leigh Hunt," I continued, "calls it 'a good-natured bowl — which accommodates itself to the means of all classes, rich and poor. You may have it of the costliest wine or the humblest malt liquor. But in no case must the roasted apples be forgotten. They are the *sine quâ non* of the wassail-bowl, and very pleasant they are, provided they are not mixed up too much with the beverage — balmy, comfortable, and different — a sort of meat in the drink — but innocent withal, and reminding you of the orchards.' Therefore, let us have, as the old Twelfth Night song has it, —

'A jolly wassel-bowl,
A wassel of good ale.'

and let us sit up late in the night drinking it, and let us, for once in our lives, be intemperate, and talk and make merry, nor go to bed till the cocks crow. For what says my friend Sir Toby, — Sir Toby Belch, — 'Not to be abed

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after midnight, is to be up betimes!' — good reasoning that, and not to be put down by such wearisome talk as Sir Andrew's: 'Nay, but I know that to be up late, is to be up late.' — 'A false conclusion,' says Sir Toby; 'I hate it as an unfilled can.' And so say I."

I looked at my wife for her approval, but she shook her head and said, —

"I fear, my dear, that your mind runs too much upon eating and drinking. I, for my part, am thoroughly tired of reading all that you have written about these matters. You never neglect an opportunity of introducing into your sketches every thing pertaining to 'deep quaffings' and 'hobnobbings,' — which last, I imagine, is not a very refined expression, — and, moreover, you appear to take an unctuous delight" —

"'Unctuous' is good, my dear," I interrupted.

"An unctuous delight, I repeat it," said my wife, "in describing breakfasts, dinners, and suppers with your bachelor friends. And now, to crown all, you are about to write a book under the title of 'Cakes and Ale,' — laying the scene at Woodbine, — just for all the world as if our little cottage were a restaurant or a red-latticed ale-house, and you were going to publish the bill of fare."

"Well, my dear," I said, smiling, "perhaps I am."

"Goodness gracious!" my wife exclaimed energetically, "I trust you will not do any such thing. If you were Monsieur Blot, or poor old Palmo, it might not matter; but, being Mr. Gray, I cannot really understand the necessity of your so doing. And then again," continued my wife, after pausing a moment to take breath, which gave me an opportunity of glancing at the little ones, who sat around in a semicircle, apparently all eyes and ears, — "what a motto you have chosen! It is simply scandalous."

"I don't, my dear, I assure you," I said, "regard it in that light. It seems to me to be a very good, as well as a very appropriate one."

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"It is very like all of that intemperate Falstaff's sayings," she answered, "and contains neither wit nor wisdom."

"In the first place," I replied, "Falstaff does not utter it, and, in the next place, it is both wise and witty. Sir Toby Belch" —

"Just as bad a man as Sir John," interrupted my wife, "and just as much given to eating and drinking."

"Sir Toby Belch," I continued, — paying no attention to my wife's remark, — "a very jolly and learned character in 'Twelfth Night,' is the author of this saying. You remember the play, of course," I added, turning to Jeannie. Jeannie said she did, and added that she had seen, only last year, Mrs. Kean in the character of Viola.

"Oh, my pretty one," I said, "you should have seen her in that character as I did, more than twenty years ago, at the old Park Theatre, when she was Ellen Tree. The Mrs. Charles Kean of to-day, and the Miss Ellen Tree of a generation ago, as Viola, are quite different characters."

Here my wife remarked that as Jeannie had not been an inhabitant of this planet at that period, her being present on the occasion referred to would have been impossible. Jeannie said that, nevertheless, she would have liked to have seen her then.

"To be sure you would," I said, "and also Malvolio, and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, and our own Sir Toby Belch — all queer and curious fellows, and given to feasting and quaffing."

"I 'll warrant you they were," said my wife.

"Aye, and took delight," I continued, "in masques and revels sometimes altogether, and were excellent in a galliard, and had mellifluous voices, and very sweet and contagious breaths, and wore yellow stockings, and were cross-gartered."

"Why, this is sheer nonsense," said my wife, "and has nothing to do with cakes and ale, that I can see, in any way."

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"Perhaps not," I replied; "but it has something to do with the play of 'Twelfth Night,' from which my motto is taken. By the way," I continued, "I observe that Mr James T. Brady, a gentleman of most versatile talents, who will write you a Christmas story; make you a Fourth of July oration, or an after-dinner speech, which will set the table in a roar; tell a story or sing a song, with the best fellow in the country; address a jury so that those composing it will bring in a verdict in accordance therewith; and who, moreover, could, if he would, — though I do not remember that he has ever been guilty of it, — prove, in a most erudite and learned manner, in a paper which he should read before either the New England or the Historical Society, that the true rock — the 'Rock of Ages,' as it might be — was not the famous Plymouth Rock, but the Shamrock."

"How a sham rock," said my wife, "can be a true rock, passes my understanding; and what, pray, has all this to do, Mr. Gray, with 'Twelfth Night?'"

"My dear," I replied, "you interrupted me before I had finished my sentence. I observe, I repeat it, that Mr. Brady has just written 'A Talk with Young Folks About Christmas,' printed in the 'Leader,' wherein he states that he was surprised to learn what Santa Claus — with whom he was having quite an interview — seemed to know very well, that the great time for the children at Rome was not Christmas Eve, but 'Twelfth Night.' And that the distributing of presents was intrusted, not to the good old Saint, but to a female called the Befana, who is any thing else but as jolly as Santa Claus. Still, however, in the absence of Santa Claus, she does pretty well, and Leigh Hunt tells us from whence she gets her name. 'In Italy,' he says 'the word Epiphany has been corrupted into Beffania or Beffana — spelling it with two f's — (as in England it used to be called Piffany); and Beffana, in some parts of that country, has come to mean an old fairy or Mother

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Bunch, who rewards or punishes children at night, by putting sweetmeats, or stones and dirt, into a stocking, hung up for the purpose, near the bed's head.' And now, my dear," I continued, growing the least bit oracular, "let me explain to you of what, under the title of 'Cakes and Ale,' I purpose to write. Instead of being everlastingly occupied in talking, as you surmise, about stuffing myself and the children" — I purposely left my wife's name out of the list — "with sweet cakes. pan-cakes, plum-cakes, short-cakes, johnny-cakes, and, indeed, every other kind of cakes under the sun, and pouring down their throats and my own, countless mugs of sparkling, foaming, creamy, October, imperial, pale, X, XX, XXX, old, and new ales, I intend to treat the subject æsthetically; regarding the title simply as meaning the good things of this life, the joys and blessings, the comforts and delights, the smiles and laughter, the soft answer that turneth away wrath, and the soothing word that drieth up tears, the bright glance of the eye, the gentle pressure of the hand, the kiss of love, and, in short, a reflex of the sunny hours and days which you and I, my dear, together with these little ones, and all who may dwell under this roof-tree with us, may pass in Woodbine Cottage."

Hereupon my wife gave me an approving smile, and drew her chair a little nearer toward the rug on which I was standing. Jeannie looked thoughtful, as if I had set her to musing of some one not present, and the little ones — at least those who had not fallen to sleep, curled up on the rug at my feet — gazed inquiringly at me.

I felt that I had said enough — that I had accomplished all that I desired to when I commenced speaking, and so, turning to Jeannie, who is our musician, I said, —

"Come, the song we had last night; it is old and plain: 'The spinsters and the knitters in the sun, and the free maids that weave their thread with bones, do use to chant it.'"

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And then, with my wife at the piano, and Jeannie and Miss Em — with such help as my poor voice could lend — singing beside her, the evening slid away, and, ere we knew it, midnight's bell had tolled.

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CHAPTER II.

WE GO A-SKATING.

"LET us go," said Jeannie, one bright, frosty morning, "a-skating."

"Now, nothing can be better," I said, "than going a-skating, except" — and here I paused a moment to obtain the undivided attention of my hearers — the family group lingering around the breakfast-table — "except," I repeated with emphasis, "staying at home."

"Pshaw!" my wife exclaimed.

And "Pshaw!" echoed Jeannie.

The little folks looked disappointed.

"But still," I continued, "as we cannot be forever staying at home, it may not be amiss, occasionally, to go a-skating. So, if you will get out your skates and furs, and wrap up warmly, we will go."

Thereupon, the children clapped their hands, and all started off in high glee to get ready. My wife said she would remain at home, and then asked me if I could skate.

"Years have gone by since I was on a pair of skates," I replied. "The snows of many winters have fallen across my pathway, leaving white flakes amidst my flowing beard since then. Great changes, too, have taken place in my life: early manhood is left behind, and mature age reigns in its stead." Here my wife interrupted me by saying that she did not wish to hear a sermon. "I remember, though, as if it were but yesterday," I went on, paying no attention to her remark, "the last time I used my skates.

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It was a clear, cold night in mid-winter, just twenty years ago, and the late moon was sinking behind the Catskills, which loomed up grandly and darkly in the distance; and the river, as far as the eye could reach, was an unbroken sheet of ice, without a solitary figure, save my own, to break its loneliness. The only sound to be heard was the sharp ring of my skate steels, as I moved swiftly along, and an occasional cracking and rumbling noise under the ice. I had been passing the evening with a friend. I had somehow gotten into the habit of passing a good many evenings with that friend"—

"Was that friend a young lady?" asked my wife.

"Well, yes," I answered.

"And her name was what?" she inquired, a little inquisitively, I thought.

"Fanny," I replied.

"Ah!" she ejaculated.

"Fanny, my dear," I continued, "was, at this time, one of the most charming girls I ever knew. She had sweet pretty ways with her, and an arch smile; and when she wanted to utter, as she often did, a sparkling repartee, she would look at me so gleefully out of her soft eyes, turning her head, coquettishly, a little on one side, that she reminded me, for all the world, of a canary bird. I knew her, too, when she wore short dresses and pantalettes, and braided her hair behind in two long cues, tying the ends with blue ribbons. She was a pet of mine, long previous to my going to college, and used to let me kiss her, in a brotherly kind of way. After I returned home, however, all this was changed. Fan had become a young lady, wore long dresses, fastened her back-hair up with a comb, and attended grown-up parties. She must have been about Jeannie's age in those days, and I was, perhaps, three or four years her senior. She had plenty of beaux and was much sought after, and went a good deal into society."

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"Then it was, I suppose," said my wife, "that you fell in love with her."

"Well, no," I replied, "I can't say that it was; the fact is, that Fan never gave me the least bit of encouragement, so that what might have been under other circumstances never came to pass. I don't think, indeed, that I ever made love to Fanny; but there was a warm friendship between us, and that was the reason I used so often to visit her."

"Is she living now, my dear?" asked my wife.

"Yes," I replied, "and a very happy wife and mother she is, too. Don't you remember you met her at my old home several years ago, and liked her as much as I did?"

"Oh!" exclaimed my wife, "if it be that Fanny, it is all right — go on with your story, please."

"Let me see," I said, ponderingly, "what was I talking about?"

"About skating," said my wife.

"Ah, I remember now," I answered. "Well, as I was saying, it was a clear, cold night, and I went gliding along over the ice — Fanny, by the by, passed a few weeks once with a friend in a neighboring village, and my shortest and quickest way thither was by skating — five miles on skates is n't much you know."

My wife, however, thought it was much, and said so.

"Well," I continued, "I did n't think it was at that time, and I used to enjoy the hour I passed on the ice, going to and fro, almost as much as I did the hours I passed with Fanny herself. There is, or rather there was, in my younger days, something very exhilarating in skating; all the muscles are brought into play, and you get into a healthful glow, which defies the cold and wind. So, as I was saying, it was a clear, cold night, and I went gliding along" —

"Don't, please, my dear," said my wife, "repeat that again."

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"Gliding along," I continued, "thinking all manner of pleasant thoughts, and not for a moment regardful of danger, when, plump, without any warning, I went into a hole which had been cut through the ice for fishing. I tell you, my dear, the shock to my nervous system, at that instant, was immense. I thought I never would get through going down amidst that cold water. At last, however, my fortune took a turn, and up I came, bumping the top of my head against the ice. The tide was falling, but I knew that the velocity with which I was moving when I went into the water, must have sent me up the stream, and that I had risen above the opening. I thought this in an instant, and I felt certain that, if I failed in the next two or three seconds in finding the opening, that I was destined to what is termed sometimes a watery grave. When one gets so as to regard seconds as important, one is in a very tight place. It was so with me at that particular juncture, and I would have given any thing for the power to have lived under water somewhat longer than I knew I could. Without exerting myself, however, I allowed the tide to float me along, hoping, every divisible part of an instant, that it would carry me to the opening. I had nothing to guide me to it, and could only trust to Providence. Oh. how smooth and cold the ice felt, as with hands, and sometimes face, touching it, I floated along. No prison walls could be more secure than was that broad roof of ice above me, and no prisoner ever had less chance of escape than I. Providence proved a true guide, for, at the moment when I had given up the hope of reaching the opening, and feared that I had drifted past it, and had resigned myself to the fate which awaited me, a breath of cold air struck my face, and my eyes opened to see the stars gleaming down upon me, and to catch the last glimpse of the moon as it sunk behind the distant mountains. To throw my arms up over the edge of the ice and hold on for dear life, was the work of an instant; and, though I had a fear at

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first that I should not be able long to hold on, this was speedily dissipated by the fact that I found that the sleeves of my coat were frozen to the ice, and that I was thus secured from falling back into the water. I could not have gotten out without help, and I feared that, at that late hour, there would be slight chance of any one's passing that way. I should be frozen to death before help arrived, and in the morning I would be found stiff and breathless. Even this, I thought, was better than lying under the ice all winter, and becoming rations for fishes, and no one knowing what had become of me, and, perhaps, thinking that I had run off with the keys of the bank or the poor-house, and never having a Christian burial; and Fanny making her eyes red with weeping for me, and without her ever having the satisfaction of being able to plant a sweet-brier on my grave. So, all things considered, I felt quite comfortable in mind, though not so comfortable in body, and was fast passing into that state when I did n't care a snap about any thing, and especially about myself, when I heard a sound that roused me instantly. It was the noise of a horse's hoofs on the ice. It was a long way off, but still it every moment came nearer, and I felt sure I was to be saved. Then it was that the hard thoughts which had been in my heart — for there had been fearfully hard and bitter thoughts there, as I clung to the ice, against the kindness and mercy of Heaven — began to soften, and a thankfulness came over me, and I could have wept for joy. On came the horse, and I could now see that he was attached to a sleigh, and that it contained several persons; as they got near, I essayed to call to them, but my voice was weak, and scarcely rose louder than a whisper. The more I tried to call, however, the stronger my voice became, until, at last, I knew, by the sleigh's stopping, that I was heard. Had there been bells on the horse, the inmates of the sleigh could not have heard me; and it was a curious circumstance, my dear, as I afterward learned, that

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previous to starting, the driver had searched for the bells unsuccessfully, and, as it turned out, they had been stolen that very evening. Now, this is a nice bit of philosophy to study out. Here, in this case, Heaven had allowed a man to become a thief, evidently for the purpose of saving my life."

My wife said she was glad of it, which, however, was scarcely the proper thing to say, for one should never be glad, as I told her, that another one had become a thief. What she meant, she said, was, that she was glad I was saved.

"And so was Fanny," I said.

"After all," remarked my wife, "you have not told me how you were saved."

"Oh," I said, "as soon as the persons in the sleigh discerned me, they drove to me, and, in a trice, had lifted me out of my bath-tub, wrapped me in furs, and were carrying me, as fast as the horse could go, to my home. Hot drinks, a warm bed, and a night's sleep, fully restored me; but I took a dislike to skating from that moment, and have never been on skates since. After that, I used to go to see Fan in a sleigh, and by the road."

"Now, do you know," said my wife, "that I believe all this is a story, from beginning to end, and that no such thing ever happened to you. And that, moreover, you never learned to skate."

"Well, my dear," I replied, "you have the privilege of believing it or not; but I have relieved my mind of it, and that answers my purpose. But here comes Jeannie and the children, — the latter looking as rosy as cherries and as gay as tulips; Jeannie, though, in her silvery gray skating dress, trimmed with white swans'-down, looks more like falling snow-flakes than any thing else."

"Be careful," said my wife, "that you don't spoil Jeannie with over-praise."

"Oh, I'll not do that," I said. "Why, don't you often

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hear me scold Jeannie for not laying my slippers straight before me, and for getting the left one where the right ought to be?"

My wife said she had not.

"Well, never mind," I replied; "come now, it is time to go."

And we went.

It was a gay scene which met our gaze when we reached the skating pond. Music was playing, flags were waving, and over the ice ladies in picturesque dresses were gliding to and fro. Jeannie's face glowed with pleasure when she saw this bright scene, and she said it was like the fairy lands, in the Polar regions, of which she had somewhere read. The little ones were very merry, and, as they put on their skates, shouted and laughed with joy. Considering that *paterfamilias* had not been on skates in twenty years, he managed to keep his equilibrium very well, and worked his way among the skaters without running against more than half a dozen. When it came, however, to illustrating the book of Euclid, paraphrasing Greek mottoes, drawing eagles and numerals, writing his wife's name, and going through the figures of fancy dances, he was a little out of practice. Still, he was not so far gone as those jolly chaps who, in spite of themselves, would persist in making great stars on the ice, whenever they struck it fairly.

I saw little of Jeannie after she got on the ice, as a gay youth, in macaroon-colored kids, carried her off to the further end of the pond, leaving to me the education of the little ones in the science of skating. The young rogues, however, were quick to learn, for the parlor skates had done duty in the autumn, and soon glided off to where a bevy of children were engaged in a game of romps.

One of the attractions of the place was the rustic cottage, with its great wood-fires blazing cheerfully, and lending a warmth and comfort to the scene. This cottage is

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something on the plan of a Swiss *châlet*, and is crowned most bountifully with quaint gables, from which little fantastic windows, like so many peeping eyes, look down upon the lake and its surroundings. All around it runs a wide piazza, with steps leading therefrom to the ice; and, if one goes up them, into the cottage itself, with its dancing hall, its dining hall, where cakes and ale are distributed, and its cosier retiring-rooms, where the ladies can arrange their waterfalls, and the gentlemen brush up their whiskers.

It must have been rather aggravating to some of the young reverend fathers of the college. who, from their scholastic apartments, could look down on the gay scene enacting beneath their windows, to feel that it would not be the proper thing for them to join in the revels of the fair damsels there disporting.

It was great fun, too, for the children to ride in the little sleigh, drawn by a pair of tiny donkeys, musical with silver bells, and prancing, like Santa Claus' reindeers, over the ice. Those donkeys were a great institution, and certainly exerted themselves to add to the merriment of the occasion.

For the *materfamilias*, whose education in early life, so far as regards skating is concerned, was neglected, a chair on runners was opportunely provided, and, with a thoughtful and attentive husband — not always her own, perhaps — behind it, was shoved to and fro over the mirror-like ice. Several of these chairs were in operation; and I am not certain but that their fair occupants enjoyed this style of skating quite as much as did those who stood on runners.

Every body, from the eldest to the youngest bit of humanity on the ice, appeared to enjoy the sport, and all seemed to vie with one another in adding, by their good humor, to the pleasure of the hour.

Every thing, however, must come to an end; and when, from the tower of the chapel, the *Angelus* sounded, it

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seemed to be the signal for the merry-makers to prepare to return home. The young moon hung over the eastern hills as, with Jeannie and the little ones, I turned my steps toward Woodbine Cottage, fully aware that the opening day at the Skating Pond had proved a great success.

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CHAPTER III.

YOUNG LOVE.

WE drew about the blazing fire in the library: my wife, Aunt Jeannie, the little ones, and myself. It was a stormy night, and the wind howled and shrieked around the corners of the cottage; and, once in a while, would seem to stop a moment at the mouth of the chimney, to whistle down its throat a note of warning for all within doors not to venture out. This bit of politeness on the part of the wind was, so far as it concerned any one of us, totally unnecessary; for I remember of saying to my wife: "Any one, my dear, who would venture out on such a boisterous night as this, unless impelled by dire necessity, must either be a fool or a madman."

My wife replied that she was not so certain of that, and looked covertly at Jeannie.

The latter personage was engaged in working on some mysterious piece of feminine attire, and, seemingly, paid no attention to what we were saying.

"Yes," I reiterated, decisively, "either a fool or a madman."

"There, my dear," said my wife, looking smilingly towards me, "you must, 'once upon a time,' have belonged to one or the other of those classes; for I clearly remember of your venturing out in much more boisterous weather than this."

"Never, my love," I replied, "never; you are greatly mistaken."

"Have you forgotten that fearfully stormy night, just be-

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fore we were married, when you came three miles over the worst kind of a country road, to see me? when it was so stormy indeed, that you could n't even hire a coach to ride thither, and so you walked all the way? Such a sight as you were! I shall never forget your appearance; spattered with mud from head to feet, and wet through and through."

"I think, my dear," I said, "that I do remember it. I believe, on that occasion, I remained at your grandfather's for three days, waiting for my clothes to dry, and wearing, in the meanwhile, a snuff-colored suit — rather full and baggy for me — belonging to the old gentleman. Yes, I was a great fool then, there 's no doubt of it; but I was fearfully in love. I have gotten bravely over it, though, now."

"Bravely over what, my dear?" asked my wife.

"Over being a great fool, of course; pray, what else could I mean?" I replied.

"I was afraid," she answered, "that you meant being in love."

"No, no," I said, drawing my chair a little nearer to the dear woman, "not so long as my heart beats, and my mind keeps its memories green. Years, my dear, sees an increase of my love for you; our little ones help to unite our hearts the more closely to each other. The love we knew in those callow days," and here I looked quietly at Jeannie, who bowed her head a trifle lower over her work, "was not so complete as is the love of these maturer years."

"But nothing can be fresher, though," said my wife, "than the first love of youth."

"Some persons," I said maliciously, "might regard it as being a little too fresh. There is a greenness about it, my dear, which detracts from its charm."

"But how full of simplicity and innocence it is!" she remarked.

"Wonderfully so," I said; "perfectly guileless and un-

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conscious of deceit. Why, my dear, young lovers are the most deceitful persons in the world. They are conspirators of the worst kind, and are always conspiring together to deceive people into the belief that they don't love each other."

"No, no," said my wife, "you are mistaken; true, they don't care to have all the world know of their love, and that is natural and proper. It is a feeling which may be termed diffidence on the part of the lover, modesty in the maiden, which leads them to practice a little bit of diplomacy; but which, in reality, never deceives any one."

"Not even when the young lady says she 'll remain at home to keep the fires up, instead of acknowledging that she expects her *beau*."

"Really, my dear," said my wife, "you are too bad; but you ought not to expect that any young lady will reveal to you the secrets of her heart."

"Heaven forbid!" I exclaimed, "that she should; but why not be straightforward and honest? I dislike deception, especially in the home circle."

Jeannie, who had silently endured my abuse as long as she was able, now quietly rose and left the room.

"There," said my wife, "I hope you are satisfied. Why you like to tease Jeannie so, I can't imagine. I don't understand what pleasure you can find in it. The poor girl was just ready to burst into tears, and she has gone to her room to have a crying-spell."

"Nonsense," I replied, "what is the use of having a nice little sister-in-law, unless you can tease her once in a while. It is better, too, to tease her than one's wife."

"But why wish to tease either?" asked my wife.

"Oh, just for fun, as the children say," I replied.

"Well, for my part, I can't see any fun in it," she answered.

"Neither did the frogs, when they were stoned by the boys," I said; "but the boys enjoyed it."

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"But you are not a boy, my dear," said my wife, "though I must allow that you often act very boyishly."

"Well, never mind about that, my love," I remarked. "Now, I don't wish to make Jeannie feel very badly, you know; so I'd like to have you go and bring her back. Tell her she must n't mind half that I say; that I don't mean a quarter of it; and that, if she 'll forgive me and come back, I 'll cut a pie."

"Cut a pie!" echoed my wife. "I'd like to know where you are going to get one; there is n't a pie, that I am aware of, in this house."

"When I say, 'cut a pie,' my dear," I replied, "I speak figuratively. To 'cut a pie' is almost identical with having 'cakes and ale.' What I mean is, that I will do something very nice for Jeannie. I 'll kiss her, perhaps, or something of that kind, you know."

My wife said she did n't know it.

"Well," I answered, "perhaps not; but, at all events, I 'll endeavor to make it pleasant and agreeable for her, and also for that bracket when it comes, which would like to support one of the ornaments of our household on its arm. Yes, tell Jeannie that I will, like the good old father in the play, whose daughter runs away and gets married, forgive and bless her, if she 'll come back."

"I wonder if you will," said Jeannie herself, opening the door and walking in, looking as smiling and cheerful as a happy milk-maid. "You don't deserve, after all your teasing, for me to make it pleasant for you again, by coming back, and"—

"And if you did n't expect," I said interrupting her, and placing her in her cosy chair by the chimney, "that Frank Brackett would soon make his appearance, you would not have come."

Jeannie blushed as if I had hit the nail on the head, and my wife said, reprovingly, "Don't, please."

Then came the expected ring at the door, and Jeannie

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blushed more than ever. Frank looked as cool though as possible, and when I asked him if it was storming out-of-doors, he replied "Not much;" though the fact was, a more severe storm had not been seen in our part of the country during the winter.

"Oh, these young folks!" I whispered to my wife, "how innocent they are!"

"Hush!" said the dear woman; "you must n't forget that we ourselves were once young and foolish, perhaps."

"But I thought," I replied, "that the present generation was wiser than that of ours."

I will give that young couple the credit of having exerted themselves during the first two hours of the evening, to make the time pass as agreeably as possible. Frank made rabbits on the wall, and tied his handkerchief — I observed it had Jeannie's initials embroidered in one corner; perhaps it was her handkerchief, though he did take it out of his own pocket — into all manner of fantastic and curious knots, for the amusement of the children, and tried to talk to me about pictures and books; while Aunt Jeannie essayed one or two songs, and told some pretty stories to the little ones. After the children had gone to the nursery, and we had drank a little brewage of punch, Frank and Jeannie got off into one corner, half hidden from sight by the drapery of a curtain, and began to talk in whispers. Then it seemed to me that it was time for the old folks to get sleepy, so my wife went off quietly to the nursery, and I threw a handkerchief over my head, and closed my eyes, and nearly went to sleep. If it had not been that I was obliged to open my mouth every once in a while to get a sip of my punch, I should have gone quite to sleep. As it was, I drowsed and drowsed, till the fire got low on the hearth, and I could hear the solitary mouse which belongs to the cottage nibbling between the ceilings, and then I made believe that I was really asleep, by snoring — but this only encouraged them to keep on

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talking. At last, when I began to think he never would go, I heard the clock striking twelve, and I proceeded, with due solemnity, to count the strokes aloud. "Good gracious!" I exclaimed, springing from my chair, "it is midnight. Here, take another punch, Frank, before you go, for nothing can be better, before one goes out into the cold, in the country, than a hot punch."

Frank, however, declined, but took his hat, and retired, in good order, with Jeannie into the hall, where, for five minutes longer, they kept up a whispering which nearly drove me crazy to hear. Finally, when I made a movement, as if going out into the hall, I heard the outer door softly close, and Miss Jeannie quietly glide up-stairs. Then I lighted a fresh cigar, and had a comfortable time for an hour alone by myself.

At the end of that period, my wife called over the banisters at the head of the stairs, to know if I was ever coming to bed.

So I raked up the ashes, and went.

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CHAPTER IV.

WE CUT A PIE.

ARE you aware, my dear," I asked of my good wife, as I was about to leave her to go into town one morning, "that this day is an anniversary in our family?"

She replied that she was not.

"Yes," I said; "this is my sister's birthday; now nothing can be better than my sister's birthday, and I propose that we celebrate it, this evening, by cutting a pie."

"Certainly," answered my wife.

"And we will ask our good friend, the 'Professor,' and 'Genial Jack,' with their household crowns and jewels, to join us."

"We will so," said my wife; "though what a pity it is that Jeannie is away; but" — and she dropped her head a little on one side, in a thoughtful manner, "where is the pie?"

"How often, my dear," I replied, "must I tell you that it is not necessary to actually have a pie on these occasions, — the spirit of the thing is all that is required. The enjoyment we experienced in childhood, in partaking of the various kinds of pies our mothers made, — not only fruit and mince, but chicken and game — and we can all remember the pleasure we received when, for having been good children, we were rewarded with an extra piece of pie, — has always occurred to me when participating in some unusually delightful festivity; and I have been led to say to myself, 'Ah, this is the extra slice of pie of my boy-

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hood;' therefore, when I wish to give my friends a great pleasure, I ask them to assist me in 'cutting a pie.'"

"Oh, I see," she replied, her eyes twinkling with delight; "it is something like the saying of 'paying too dear for the whistle.'"

"Not at all," I said; "on the contrary, it strikes me as being something quite the reverse."

"Oh, I mean," she said, "only in regard to its being a similar kind of — if you will pardon me for using the word — slang expression."

"Good gracious! my love," I exclaimed; "I shall not be surprised to hear you speak of some of the familiar proverbs of Solomon as being slang expressions. What, think you, would the sage Franklin, with his great store of aphorisms and 'Poor Richard's Sayings,' have thought, if he could have heard you speak of one of his pet phrases as a slang expression? Nor can you imagine, my dear," I continued, "how deeply you have hurt my feelings in casting the reflection which you did upon my original and *apropos* expression of 'cutting a pie.'"

"My dear husband," said my wife, the tears rising into her eyes, as she placed a hand on each of my shoulders and looked up into my face, "I had no intention of saying aught to grieve you, and, do you know" — a happy thought evidently striking her, for her countenance began to break into smiles — "that I have imagined, ever since I heard you make use of that expression, 'cutting a pie,' that we cut our first pie together when we got married!"

"That is pretty good," I said; "but, do you know that I think you got the larger piece, my dear?"

She replied that that never had occurred to her; but, possibly, it might be so.

When evening came, and my friends had assembled in my little library, and we were enjoying our *otium cum dignitate*, combined with grace and elegance, my gentle wife surprised us by inviting us into the dining-room to "cut a

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pie." Although there was no pie on the table, there were other things, however, which filled the void quite as well, — a cold boiled ham, sundry roasted grouse, a supply of sardines, some olives, and other appetizing dishes. For the benefit of the Professor, I placed a few bottles of California hock before him, which he said was good. The genial Jack stuck closely to the aster ale until late in the evening, when the Professor, having been invited to brew a punch, consented, and straightway concocted a beverage which emperors might be glad to quaff, and which, in feeling at least, would make civilians kings. Over our punch and pecan nuts, which our Flash poet had sent us from Galveston, we lingered long and lovingly. Quaint stories were told, and olden scenes revived. The history of the wake, at Johnny Coyle's, in Washington, of that fine "Arkansaw gentleman," Albert Pike, was narrated; and the genial Jack sang, with great applause, several verses of the captain's comical and classical version of his visit to, and escape from, the dominions of Pluto, which he originally sung on the occasion of the wake, — "all of which he saw and part of which he was."

"It may not be amiss," I said to my wife, "to transcribe the two verses from the poem which relate to the genial Jack and the Professor."

As my wife said "aye" to this, I herewith give the stanzas. First, the Professor: —

"And Alexander Dimitry's great soul shall come to claim
Its place among the giants, and upon the roll of fame;
The noble by God's patent he, the fiery and the frank,
Who, at the living springs of truth, its inspiration drank.
One spree at Johnny Coyle's, one spree at Johnny Coyle's,
And who would not be glad to join a spree at Johnny Coyle's?"

And now the genial Jack: —

"Jack Savage next, who, heart in hand, demands who wants a friend?
Where Freedom is to fight for, where the Right is to defend?
One spree at Johnny Coyle's," &c.

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Of course, we indulged largely on this festive occasion, in drinking the health of my beloved sister, to whom we were indebted for this joyous anniversary. Sundry speeches were made, too, and the Professor wielded his battle-axe of anathemas and denunciations with a vigor and power which required all the skill, with his slender rapier of wit, which genial Jack possessed, to parry and defend himself from being cloven to the earth. The crowns and jewels of our separate houses, gathered around the mahogany, sat astounded at the thunderings and lightnings that rumbled and flashed across the table, and it was not until I presented to the Professor the olives of peace in one hand, and poured oil upon the troubled waters with the other, in the form of a punch which the genial Jack amicably received, that the clouds rolled away and the sunshine broke again, in radiant light, upon the scene. Merrier grew the festivity as the hours went by; bright smiles lighted up each face, and jubilant laughter ran around the board. Once more sweet songs were sung; once more jokes and nuts were cracked together, and once more we "cut a pie."

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CHAPTER V.

THE PROFESSOR.

"MY friend, the Professor," I said, addressing Jeannie —

"Our friend, if you please," my wife said, interrupting me.

"Our friend, the Professor," I continued, accepting the correction, "is a man of mark."

"He is a remarkable man," my wife, with emphasis, added.

"My dear," I said reprovingly, "no puns are allowed in connection with the Professor."

My wife declared her entire innocence of any such intention.

"You know," I continued, "how averse he is to punning. Why, it was only a short time ago, while you, Jeannie, were on a visit to your beau's third cousin, Miss Gobetween, that Major Minor and myself were indicted, through the Professor, and tried before three judges in hoops, for the crime of punning. The prosecution was conducted by the Hon. Mr. Requiescat, and the defense — who ever heard of the like? — by the instigator of the suit, the learned Pundit himself. Of course we were convicted, and the decision of the court — written, I am strongly of the opinion, by the Professor — was rendered in these words" (hereupon I took from my desk a paper stamped with an official seal, of large size, and proceeded to read its contents aloud): —

"*In Re The College of Wit* vs. *Tom Minor and B. Gray.*

"PRISONERS, — You have been arraigned and tried for the commission of a high misdemeanor, if not a heinous

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crime, against the canons, which, in the Republic of Wit and in the realms of Intellect, regulate both sportive wit and common sense.

"Attending closely to the nature of the offense for which you have been most impartially tried; weighing the testimony of intelligent witnesses, whose every leaning inclined to your acquittal; disposed, by every allowable consideration, to extend to you the benefit of the most slender doubt that ever was extended to the veriest criminal; — this court, gathered from the vicinage, and instinct with all the suggestions of loving kindness which your former unblemished proofs of wit had secured for you — this court, in spite of the hopelessly ingenious defense of your counsel, who talked himself hoarse in your behalf — this court, in view of the irresistibly logical argument of the prosecutor, whose indignant protests disarmed your unavailing counsel, and whose inevitable reasoning has satisfied us, we regret to say, of your heinous crime of invading the sacred treasuries of mind, and uttering counterfeits of wit:

"This court, in obedience to the appeal of mercy — yet in guardianship of the purer traditions of that wit, from which, by long usage and participation, this court will modestly say it never has been an alien — considers, prisoners, that the guilt of corrupted and corrupting wit has been fully and clearly traced to you. As a terror, therefore, to all wrong-doers of your kind in the future; as an amulet for all who, thoughtless and brainless, and brainless and thoughtless, and therefore inexperienced, might, in the present, be tempted and seduced by your direful influences; nay, in kindly warning to you, yourselves, who have so *boringly* given evidence to the lineal brotherhood of wit how readily and how easily "even brains, well-fashioned, of the better class," can be perverted into miserable kennel-wit; this court, however, regretfully, in the reluctant exercise of its duty, deems, adjudges, and decrees:

"That you, and each of you, 'Tom Minor,' the greater

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in *crime*, though the lesser in *name;* and you, 'B. Gray,' whose cognomen implies the autumn experience, and the sober wisdom of matured life, while your flagitious act has marked you for the greenest softness of verdant existence, shall be confined in the kitchen — the fit meditation-chamber for the reekings of your unfortunate wit — for the space of five minutes, and that, during the space of said five minutes, you shall, each of you, swallow and ingurgitate five wine-glasses full of cold water, to sober down the orgies of your excessive wit. The court has decided.

"Marshal, carry out the sentence of the court."

Jeannie remarked, after I had finished the reading of it, that she thought the punishment was too severe for the offense; and that, if she had constituted one of the court, she would have substituted ale for water, and thrown in a few cakes, to create a thirst.

"But tell me," she continued, "something more about the Professor, for you know I have not seen him."

"Well," I said, "the Professor would be *the* noticeable man among a thousand. Even in stature he would rise above most of them; and, measured by his intellect, he would stand the giant of the throng. Imagine a grand massive head of the Jupiter type, crowned with thick, bushy, iron-gray hair; a brow, scowling generally like the heavens when engaged in a thunder-storm, but which, like them, at times, can be all smiles and sunshine; and a winning smile, too, has the dear old Professor; a pair of eyes, sharp or mild-looking, as the occasion demands, overhung by heavy eyebrows; a square resolute mouth; a well-developed nose of a Roman character, and a countenance expressive of will, ability, and power; and you will get a very good idea of the appearance of the Professor. He is not only Johnsonian in character; but Grandisonian. Dr. Johnson was not more learned and brusque, nor Sir Charles Grandison more polite and polished. He is full of

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arguments, contradictions, and paradoxes. He will, one moment, go into a towering rage, if you venture to disagree with him as to the derivation of a Greek word; and the next, will smile benignly and tenderly upon you, for agreeing with him that, under certain circumstances, black may be white. His voice is like the roaring of a lion; or, in his tender moments, like the cooing of many doves. His opinions in regard to matters and things, must always be received, as he himself would say, '*cum grano salis.*' He will cook you a rare dish, and at the same time be engaged in translating a Greek poem. He is addicted to Latin and Greek quotations, and will, moreover, give you a verse or a metaphor from the Persian poets, and dovetail the loose joints of a paragraph with the wise sayings of Chaldee or Sanscrit sages. Confucius is not too far off, nor the author of "Sybil" too near, for him to quote from. But, in putting down the Major, whilom the gay and festive Tomaso, who is apt, on occasions, to make long speeches, he contents himself with using this trite, though telling phrase: '*Satis eloquentiæ, sapientiæ pàrum.*' Which, being translated, runs: — 'Plenty of eloquence, but little wisdom.' As for the Professor himself, he is a perfect encyclopædia of wisdom, and, as you will infer from what I have just said, is always willing, not to say desirous, of grafting a little of it upon his friends. The last time I dined with him, he put about a score — I came very nearly to saying twenty, but I think a score sounds better — of grafts into me, somewhere between the bringing on of the punch and the hour of going home. He must that night, I think, have gone back, in memory, to his 'classic days,' for he was exceedingly happy and apt in his quotations. I can recall, however, only one or two of them. He had, according to his own confession, come to the dinner feeling a little cross, but the great dish of the occasion, a game pie (concocted with venison for its base, quail, grouse, and partridges for its centre, and a layer of robins and English snipes for

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its top-dressing), put him in good humor, and he opened his battery of quotations, by firing the first shot at himself. 'Like the crabbed guest in Plautus,' he said, 'softened by the magic of a gorgeous feast, I may say: *Animus saturatus bonarum cogitationum epulis* — the fumes of the dish saturated my mind with kindly thoughts.' "

"And a very proper quotation it was," said my wife.

"It was so," I replied, "and I remember I remarked to him that he might be called the Epulo of the feast, for he had had a hand, not only in getting up the banquet, but also in partaking of it."

"What is an *Epulo?*" Jeannie inquired.

"The *Epulo*, my sweet sister," I replied, "was the minister charged with preparing the feast or banquet, on great occasions, for the gods; but the best of the joke is, that, with his brother Epulones, after having prepared the feast, they devoured it themselves."

"And a very good thing, too, it was for them to do," said my wife.

"I remember that the gay and festive Tomaso," I said, "sung a little song, in praise of good living, that he declared to be his own composition, but which I think was stolen, not exactly *holus bolus*, as J. S. would say, but by piecemeal from various Christmas carols. The words, as nearly as I can recall them, are: —

"'Come help me to raise
Loud songs to the praise
Of good old country pleasures;
To the Christmas cheer,
And the foaming beer,
And the buttery's solid treasures.

"'To the stout sirloin,
And the rich spiced wine,
And the game-pie calmly waiting;
To hot-mince pie,
And, to those who 're dry,
The punch so elevating.

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"'Then join with a noise,
Ye girls and ye boys,
In the merry song I 'm singing;
And eat to your fill,
And drink with a will
The good things the *Epulo* is bringing.'

"After the gay and festive Tomaso had concluded his song, the genial Jack was called upon for one. Whereupon he sung one descriptive of the merits of pies — every verse being devoted to the praise of a different kind of pie. Then the Professor proceeded to give us a learned dissertation upon game and meat pies, commencing with the famous one wherein the four and twenty blackbirds were baked, and coming down, growing more and more encomiastical as he proceeded, to the one of which we had just partaken, and which he pronounced to be, in the words of Festus: '*de cibis qui Diis afferuntur*' — 'a specimen of a dish fit for the gods.' "

"How I wish," exclaimed Jeannie, "that I had been present. I should so like to see the dear old Professor."

"Some time," I said, "when the Professor has a birthday, you shall dine with him, and hear him talk."

"Does the Professor often have a birthday?" asked Jeannie.

"Well, I don't think," I replied, "that he has them oftener than other men; but he has had more than some men ever have, and I would not be greatly surprised if he should have another one before many weeks glide by."

"I hope so," said Jeannie.

And here the conversation came to a close.

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CHAPTER VI.

A CUCKOO CLOCK IS HEARD.

EVERY body, at Woodbine Cottage and in the neighborhood appears to be having a birthday. From the Professor, with his three-score years and one, to the babe who just walks alone, and is three-score years behind him, — all are celebrating, or about to celebrate, this anniversary. Even my wife, a most estimable woman, and who, moreover, deserves all the birthdays she gets, had the good fortune, the present week, to fall upon one of these red-letter days. It came quite suddenly upon her; for, somehow, the almanacs in the country are not to be depended upon as are those of the city. This is especially noticeable when, as my wife did, one gets hold of a last year's almanac, thinking it to be the regular thing. Then it very often happens that the examiner for birthdays gets one day behind in the reckoning. This was the case with my wife, and, therefore, when I sent home to her, as a birthday present, a cuckoo clock, she was not quite prepared to receive it. She said I was a little ahead of time, and that was something quite unnecessary. When I had convinced the dear woman that I was in the right and she in the wrong, she said it was too bad, and that, somehow, she had lost a day; "and a day lost, my dear," she continued, "can never, you know, be found."

"As I have never lost one," I replied, "though I may spend them very foolishly, — and throw in the nights beside, — I cannot tell about it, but will accept for granted that which you say."

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The clock which I presented to my wife was an elaborately carved affair, representing a Swiss cottage perched on an inaccessible rock. Goupil imported it expressly for me, and it reached, in its packing-case, my cottage in safety. It arrived there during my absence, and great was the curiosity and anxiety of my little ones to know what were its contents. My wife even, and Aunt Jeannie, confessed to having felt an unusual desire to learn what that odd, foreign-looking box contained. The children were promised that the secret should be revealed to them as soon as papa came home; but, as fate would have it, I was unusually late that evening, and the little ones got quite sleepy before my arrival. Little Mary actually toppled over on the sofa, and went fast to sleep; but, the moment my step was heard on the veranda, they were all as wide awake as busy bees, and clustered around me in an instant. Then the box was placed upon the table, and with the little ones gathered about it, was carefully opened and unpacked. Many were the exclamations of surprise when their eyes first rested upon the clock. They took it for a toy-house, and "Is it mine, papa?" each asked.

"No," I answered, "it is for your mother; and it is n't a toy-house, but a clock — a cuckoo clock."

Of course, they were desirous of seeing and hearing the cuckoo, and their mother said that they might wait until I had put it up and set it a-going before they need go to bed. It was more of a task, however, to place it in the proper situation and get it started than I had anticipated, and it was nearly midnight ere it was in a condition to be wound up and started.

While I was occupied in making it ready, Em repeated to me some lines addressed to the cuckoo, commencing, —

"Sweet bird, thy bower is ever green,"

which she thought especially suited to the occasion. Whether they were or not, it was pleasant to hear her

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recite them, and carried me, in memory, back to the time when, a school-boy, I wandered through the leafy woods and listened to the cuckoo's song. The clock, at last, was ready to begin operations; the weights were drawn up, the pendulum set in motion, and the long-expected hour came round when the hands pointed to eleven o'clock. Tick, tick, went the clock, the children stood on tiptoes beneath it; mamma and Aunt Jeannie, seated in their rocking-chairs, looked quietly on; while papa, standing with folded arms, like Napoleon at St. Helena, said, as the long ivory minute-hand drew close to the hour, "Now!"

"Tick, tick," said the clock. The minute-hand moved slowly along..

"The cuckoo, surely, must make his appearance now," I said, a little dubiously, however; for the hand had gained the centre of the figure XII, and was creeping past it, and yet all that the clock said was "Tick, tick," — indeed, it went quite past without uttering any other sound; but, for five minutes, we watched it patiently, hoping that the bird would yet come forth, and that he was only a little backward in making his appearance before strangers. At last, even the most sanguine of us gave it up, and I said: "There must be something wrong in my arrangement of those chains, my dear; I will rearrange them." So I placed them a little differently, and again set the clock in motion. The children had early discovered that there were two little doors in the front of the clock, and wished to know if there were more than one cuckoo within it.

"No," I replied, "only one cuckoo, and he calls the hours; but there is also a quail, who comes forth and whistles the quarters."

This was very gratifying information, and caused the children to grow wider awake than ever. I felt certain that the approaching quarter would prove successful, and awaited anxiously for the moment. At the instant the minute-hand pointed to the quarter past eleven the right-

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hand door in the clock opened, and out sprung the quail, which whistled once, and then went back into his nest. This proved, satisfactorily, that there were birds in that clock; but the children did not get as much of the whistle as they wished to have, and so, with mamma's permission, they were allowed to sit up to await the next appearance of the quail. The minutes dragged slowly along; but the half hour finally came around, and, true to the minute, the bird jumped out and gave forth two shrill whistles. Then he went in again. The children, being satisfied with the quail, were now more than ever anxious to hear the cuckoo; so I consented to hurry up the clock, and bring the hour of twelve a few minutes earlier than it would naturally come. Then I turned the hands forward, and the third quarter brought out the quail in due order. When the hand reached the fourth quarter, the watchful interest of the children greatly increased, and, after the quail had whistled and the cuckoo did actually make his appearance and cry the twelve hours, the excitement among them was, to use a phrase of genial Jack's, immense. No sooner had the cuckoo retired in good order, than out sprung the quail and whistled the quarters; then out came the cuckoo again, and called one, and immediately thereafter the quail appeared, and gave us the quarters; then the cuckoo, not to be outdone, once more came forth and sounded his notes for two o'clock; and, to make a long story short, it was quail and cuckoo, cuckoo and quail, till even the most desirous among us of hearing them was satisfied, and would have forgiven them even if they had never again opened their beaks.

After this thing had gone on for a half hour, I said: "My dear, I think there is something wrong about that clock. It don't strike me that those birds are doing the proper thing."

"They seem to me," said my wife, "to be rather overdoing it, and I wish that you would stop them."

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"It is all very well," I answered, "to say stop them; but I don't know how it is to be done. It is certainly provoking."

"Provoking!" echoed my wife; "it is abominable. How we are going to sleep to-night, with that contest going on between these birds, I can't imagine. You must do something — pull one of those brass chains, and see what will come of it."

I pulled the one, the weight attached to which was nearest to the floor, and the only effect was, if any thing, to increase the vivacity of the birds. We stood it for fifteen minutes longer, until the song of the cuckoo grew unpleasing even to unmarried ears, and the very children asked me to stop him.

"Take it out into the barn," said my wife.

"Sink it in the cistern," said Aunt Jeannie.

"Take it over to the college," said Em.

"No," I said, "I will send it up to the Professor; he will, possibly, be able to use the birds in a gombo, and will invite us to the feast."

"I would n't have the dear old Professor tormented with it," my wife said. "No, take it back, in the morning, to Goupil's, and exchange it for a picture."

"That is all very well," I replied; "but the question is, What shall we do with it to-night? If it keeps on in this manner, none of us will get a wink of sleep."

"Will it not run down by and by?" my wife asked.

"Probably it will," I answered; "but, I believe, those confounded things will run eight days after once winding them up, and we would all be in an insane asylum before that time."

"But there must be a way to stop these birds," my wife said, approaching the clock and scrutinizing it closely.

"We might," the boy in boots said, rubbing his sleepy little eyes, "twist off their heads, as Michael does with the chickens."

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"Or, better still," his mother said, suiting the action to the words, "take off these weights."

The quail piped shrilly, the cuckoo sung his loudest notes, and then the two were silent.

I have always thought that my wife possessed a mechanical turn of mind, and, when I saw her lift from their chains those weights, which resemble the cones of pine-trees, I was convinced of it. The silence which followed was most grateful to our ears, and, satisfied that we could at last rest during the night, undisturbed by our cuckoo clock, we went to bed.

When, the following day, I called at Goupil's, and related to my friend Knoedler the trouble I had had with the clock, he explained, with that suavity of manner which characterizes him, why it had arisen and how to prevent its recurrence. I am happy to be able to state that, by following his directions, our cuckoo clock has been made to conduct itself in an exemplary and consistent manner. It has obtained, too, a reputation in the neighborhood, and is visited daily by admiring throngs of children, who, with open mouths and eyes, watch it for hours, listening with delight to the shrill pipings of the quail and the more musical notes of the cuckoo.

My wife is well pleased with her gift, and the little ones are convinced that their home was not complete until it possessed a cuckoo clock; and, indeed, as I said to my wife, nothing can be better, in the country, than a cuckoo clock.

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CHAPTER VII.

THE PROFESSOR MAKES A GOMBO.

THE Professor had a birthday a short time since. In fact, the Professor has fallen into such a habit of having birthdays — he has had three-score and over — that he could not very well avoid having another this year; and the probability is, that he will be likely to have twenty or thirty more before he ceases to assemble his friends around his social board. When the year comes, however, wherein he fails to celebrate this anniversary, it will be because he has passed to another sphere, where time is not, and birthdays are not kept. I said something like this to my wife. The dear woman looked seriously at me as I spoke, and gave a little sigh.

"Ah! these sighs," I exclaimed; "how much they express! What memories they evoke! I don't like to have you sigh, my dear, for I cannot avoid, when I hear you, thinking that you are unhappy, and that, of course, makes me unhappy. Especially on an occasion like this, when we are about to celebrate a birthday, you should be exceedingly careful not to do aught to call forth a sorrowful emotion. No, my love, you should smile, and laugh, and speak cheerful words. The other day, on the occasion of of my sister's birthday, as you know, we 'cut a pie'; to-day we are invited to the Professor's house to 'eat a gombo;' and in this instance, I am happy to say, the request to 'eat a gombo' is not used in a figurative sense, but is one of those delightful realities which it is so satisfactory to encounter. Therefore let us go there, my dear, you and Jeannie and I, with sunny hearts, clear consciences, and good appetites."

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"Pray, tell me, husband," asked my wife, "what is a gombo?"

"It is a dish," I replied, "of which, having once eaten, you'll straightway ask for more. As to its component parts, I will leave it to the Professor himself to enlighten you."

When we reached the Professor's house, we found several friends already assembled. The "genial Jack," with the "magnificent" at his side, was making himself very much at home. Josephus and the "Major" were engaged in a political discussion. A daughter of the South and a son of the North were coquetting together in a corner. The matron received, with grace and dignity, her guests; while the Professor, having laid aside his helmet, shield, and spear, had assumed, figuratively speaking, the paper-cap, white apron, and ladle of a *chef-de-cuisine*, to superintend the making of the gombo. Between the giving of the directions for the putting together of the ingredients composing it, he found time, however, to ask his friends to join him in imbibing sundry beverages of a tonic, Platonic, and Teutonic character.

When "quaint Tom" and "comical Bob," acting as ushers, announced that the gombo was on the table, the guests, with a celerity which was delightful to witness, allowed themselves to be shown to their several seats. For the first few minutes little was said — the attention of all around the table being devoted exclusively to the partaking of the excellent dish before them, and to which they did most ample justice — though, I believe, I did remark that this (referring to the sumptuous entertainment spread before us) was something like "cakes and ale."

Pending the departure of the gombo and the arrival of the turkey — and I must be allowed to say, *en passant*, of that turkey, that it was a magnificent one: brown and crisp on the outside, done to a turn within, and filled with a dressing of oysters and pecan-nuts — I asked the Pro-

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fessor, in my most dulcet tones, to favor me, for the sake of my readers, with the recipe for that gombo. "For why," I asked, "should one of the good things of life be kept solely for the delectation of our own circle?"

"I regard it," said the Professor, with an impressiveness and earnestness of manner which the subject warranted, "as my bounden duty to give to my friends all the information which I may possess in regard to making a gombo, and, therefore, my dear young friend, I take infinite pleasure in revealing to you the secrets of this dish. This of which we have just partaken, you must understand, is not an okra gombo, for I could find, at this season, no okra in market — but a sassafras gombo, and it is thus made: —

"Take a quart or a pint of oysters, according to the quantity of stock required.

"Give them a parboil in their own liquor, to which, if undiluted, a cupful of water may be added in the act of parboiling. This being done, take them off of the fire and set them aside.

"Slice and cut up a good-sized onion; having also ready about a teaspoonful of finely chopped parsley.

"Cut up, in not large pieces, a chicken or a half of one, according to the stock desired, and four or five ounces of ham, in small pieces. You have now all the materials for your stock, which is made as follows:

"First fry your onions in hot lard. When softened and turning brown, fish them out of the lard, taking care to leave no particles, which charring, would impart a bitter flavor to the stock.

"Then throw into the hot lard your chicken and ham, which, when done brown, sprinkle gradually with a cupful of hot water, throwing in your chopped parsley. Cover the vessel and give a simmer of five minutes on a slow fire. At this point may be added, if acceptable, a half pod of cayenne pepper, or a sufficient quantity of the ground, to

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give pungency. No cold water is to be used in making stock.

"Continue every five minutes to add your cupful of hot water, keeping up the simmering — never boiling, though, until you have your due quantity of stock for the number of plates which you may have to serve.

"The last addition of liquid to complete, is to be made from the liquor of the oysters, which, with them, is thrown in to simmer a few minutes more.

"So far we have merely, my friends, a rich composite stew, which is now to be converted into the gombo by the following process. Have ready about a heaped tablespoonful of pounded sassafras leaves (dried) finely sifted. Draw your stock from the fire, and, by sprinkling the sassafras over the liquid, rapidly beating it at the same time with a spoon — as if breaking eggs — thoroughly incorporate the powder with the stock, and, *Io Pæan!* the gombo is done.

"*Nota Bene.* — Never, my friends, attempt to add the sassafras while the vessel is on the fire. The result of this would be to precipitate the powder to the bottom of the vessel, and, literally, send your gombo to — pot.

"At the board, the gombo may be served as a thickened soup, to be eaten with boiled rice, or bread, as may be preferred. The rice, however, is an element in the ritual of gombo.

"I observe, my friends, that the Major, who, owing to the circumstances of my being disabled by a slight accident from using my hand in carving, kindly undertook to perform that task, has completed it, with admirable success, and is now resigning the chair in my favor. Consequently, what I have further to say in relation to gombo, I will defer, with your permission, until later in the evening."

Then we ate the turkey and the fricasseed oysters — a new dish, by the by — and the various flanking dishes, including a game-pie, with the words, "We cut a pie," em-

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bossed in paste upon its upper crust; and, when we thought we could eat no more, a dish of roasted quails, *en papillote*, tempted us to renew our appetites. All these good things, washed down with sparkling wines, — the wine of which I once sung, and would again this evening, only nobody asked me, — I say all these good things kept us at the table until the great hours of the night were passed, and the smaller ones, the other side of midnight, dropped in by ones and twos.

Of the speeches that were made and the songs that were sung, who is able to write? The genial Jack was the first to take the floor, and, in a little speech of much truthfulness and beauty, spoke, with touching effect, of the love like that of a son toward a father, which he, for years, had borne the Professor, and which neither absence nor difference of opinion had, in the least, caused to grow cool, and wound up by proposing the Professor's health.

That it was drunk with appropriate honors who can doubt? And that the Professor's reply was couched in the choicest and tenderest of language, and expressed with a pathos and sentiment which brought honest tears to the eyes of those around that board, none who listened to it will be likely to forget. I dare not attempt to give his words. He spoke, though, of many scenes of joy and sorrow through which he had passed during the sixty-one years of his pilgrimage on earth. He had been blessed with many friends, and he felt thankful that, even at this late period of his life, he had found some new friends, no less dear to him than the old ones, of whom his dear boy Jack — pointing to the genial individual of that name across the table — was an especial one. Many fine and noble words fell from his lips, and, when he sat down, there was a moment of silence, and then a round of hearty applause.

The gay and festive Major, or Minor, as the Professor persisted in calling him, was, after much persuasion, gotten upon his feet, and induced to loosen his tongue to utter a

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few words. After he had once started, however, it was found impossible to stop him until he had run entirely down. The Professor has been termed a "polyglot gentleman," because of his intimate knowledge of many tongues; but the Major is a living dictionary, and sometimes one would imagine, while hearing him speak, that he had gathered his ideas at random from the pages of several dictionaries, and was throwing them out loosely right and left — but oftener left — hitting his hearers with them in a most reckless and extravagant fashion. Sometimes they touch the heart like balsam, sometimes like caustic; but this extra excess and redundancy in my friend, the Major, only comes out when the punch goes in; for, as a rule, the Major's language is well chosen, his words discreet, and there is a natural eloquence and power in his utterance which arrests attention and commands respect.

My good friend Josephus is, like myself, not much given to speech-making; but he evidently kept brewing something in his mind, for, every once in a while, a good jest would hop out of his mouth, and was immediately stamped by the Major with the mystic letters PXX. Whether these have aught to do with his barrels of aster-ale, those learned in such matters must decide.

Early in the morning, just as we were on the point of "breaking up" and retiring to our separate estates, it occurred to me that the Professor owed us a few more words upon the subject of gombo. Therefore, when appealed to on the subject, he said: "Any intelligent *artiste en cuisine*" — and here he looked directly at the Major, who bowed low, in grateful acknowledgment of the compliment; for, next to his ability to make a speech, the Major takes pride in being able to make an *omelette* and other delicious dishes — "who heard my grand directions for the grand gombo — the gombo of gomboes — the gombo *filé*, or ropy gombo, would be enabled to make one at the first attempt. That being settled, I now desire to tell you the *unde deri-*

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vatur" — the Professor got more polyglotical as it drew nearer morning — "of the word gombo. It comes from the name of the plant from which the original gombo was made. It is an Indian dish, and the name is derived from that of the vegetable *quim-bombo*" — more and more polyglotical, you see — "the *Okra Hibiscus*, very plentiful in the island of Cuba. You can readily perceive, my friends," and here the Professor looked mildly around the room, as if he would like to find some one who would be pleased to say that he or she did n't perceive it, so that he might go to the very root of the matter or the plant, and dig up something therefrom to prove that he was right in what he was going to say, — "you can readily perceive," he repeated, "how the abbreviation and corruption of the word *quim-bombo*" — this time impressively, and with much feeling — "drifted into gombo."

I ventured humbly to say that I did n't see it.

The Professor stopped short in his remarks, and, laying his right-hand forefinger against the side of his nose, looked steadily and sternly at me for a moment, as much as to say, "Young man, I don't care to interrupt myself, at this moment, by stopping to talk this matter over with you; but I will bear you in mind, and will attend to your case in a day or two;" then, nodding his head in a wise fashion, he proceeded: "The form of dish which you, my good, dear friends, have done me the honor of assisting in eating, on this ever-to-be-remembered occasion — my sixty-first birthday — the recipe of which I gave you, is that of the aboriginal Indians of Louisiana, taken, however, from its rude, embryonic state, and raised up to the dignity of, certainly, one of the richest meals that the ingenuity of cookery has devised; and, considering the excellence of this dish, and appreciating the many good things which assist in forming it — for crabs, shrimps, mushrooms, etc., can be effectively employed — I regard it as worthy of the table of the most august. As Cicero happily expresses it: —

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'*Nihil, nisi lautum, nisi elegans, nisi exquisitum;*'"

which, literally translated, reads: "All about it (feast or dish) was luscious, elegant, exquisite, and — nothing else."

I think I somewhat astonished the learned Professor by stealing his thunder and retorting: "*Conveniunt, celebrantque dapes vicina simplex.*" "We came together, we plain home-folks of the neighborhood, and we had a jolly time of a feast."

As it was evident, even to the least spiritually inclined of the party, that nothing more could be said or done on this occasion, we again wished the Professor a happy new year, and bade him and his household "Good-night."

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CHAPTER VIII.

SLEIGH-RIDING.

THE merry jingle of sleigh-bells fell upon the ears of the children, as they sat before the library fire the other evening. The sound came nearer and nearer, and they heard the crack of the driver's whip, and the creaking of the runners on the frozen snow. Suddenly the bells ceased to resound.

"Why!" exclaimed my wife, "it really seems as if that sleigh stopped at our door."

There was a rush of quick feet to the windows, a drawing aside of heavy curtains, and the planting of several little noses against the frosted window panes. Simultaneously the individual owners of those feet and noses shouted:

"Yes, mamma, and it 's empty, and the driver is standing up in front, slapping his arms, and looking right at the house."

"Now, I wonder," I said, "if that sleigh has n't come here on purpose to take all of us out a sleigh-riding! It would be just like it to do so. It is a fine moonlight night, and the air, though frosty, is still, and the sleighing is capital. Besides, nothing can be better in the country than a sleigh-ride. It is 'cakes and ale' to all concerned in it. Therefore I think, little ones," I continued, "that you may get ready for one. Wrap yourselves up warmly, and be back here again in five minutes."

Somehow mamma must have had a premonition of this sleighing party, for the children found, when they went to the nursery, that their coats, and furs, and comforters, and

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mittens, and thick shoes were all spread out on chairs before the fire, getting thoroughly warm, as if they fully expected little bodies would come and get into them.

It did not take long for the children, with Aunt Jeannie's assistance, to get ready for taking their places in the sleigh. Indeed, mamma was not quite prepared when they returned to the library, so they had an opportunity to run out to the sleigh and get into it before us.

We were quite disappointed when we found that Aunt Jeannie was not going.

No, she said, we must excuse her. It was too cold; she did n't feel very well; she had a new novel to read; and, besides, she thought she ought to stay at home and keep up the fires: unless she did they would all go out, and we 'd be nearly frozen when we got back.

I said, "Nonsense! the servants will attend to the fires. Come, put on your things and go with us."

But it was of no use; Aunt Jeannie shook her head and looked meditatively at the blazing fire. I could n't help wondering to myself why that young woman refused to make one of our party. As a rule, Aunt Jeannie enjoys such frolics, and, I must say, I was disappointed when she declined to go. During the ride I asked my wife what was the matter with Jeannie?

"Oh, you men," she replied, "are sometimes very blind in regard to what is going on around you. When you were courting me" — and my wife slipped her hands under the furs into mine — "did n't I often stay at home from concerts, and lectures, and even church, when I expected you to pass the evening with me?"

"You don't mean to say," I exclaimed, pretending ignorance, "that any one is courting our Jeannie. What is the use of the children's having an aunt if she be going to get married right away. I would n't have had you ask her to spend the winter with us, if I had thought any sprig of a fellow round about here would have made love to her. Who is he?"

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"It appears to me," said my wife, not answering my question, "that you have grown very selfish lately. You evidently wish to keep Jeannie all to yourself; you already have her do many things which the children formerly did for you. She places your easy-chair before the fire for you when you are expected home; sees that your slippers are warm; and fills your pipe with tobacco. By and by, I suppose, you 'll ask her to brush your hair, and trim your whiskers for you."

"Nonsense!" I said; "it is for the children's sake, my dear, that I don't want Aunt Jeannie to get married. Why, when I was a boy, I had lots of aunts, and none of them, till I grew up thought of getting married. They would n't have left me unprotected, as it were, — though, to be sure, my mother and grandmother were pretty good hands at taking care of me, — for the world."

"Yes," said the dear woman, "and too many aunts spoiled the boy; and now the wife and sister are expected to keep it up."

"At all events," I replied, "it does n't look as if our boys and girls were going to be spoiled by a superabundance of aunts. But who, I would like to know, is courting our Jeannie?"

"You will, probably, be able to answer that question yourself when we return home," my wife said.

And with this reply I was obliged to be contented.

Many years have elapsed since I took a sleigh-ride before in the country. Sleighing in the city, or even in Central Park, is very different from what it is out of town. There may be more excitement in it — more danger, indeed — but its best characteristics are wanting. A perfectly smooth road, with a wide level track, is not entirely satisfactory; you need a road filled with cradle-holes, somewhat narrow, so that you find great difficulty in turning out to allow an approaching sleigh to pass, and an occasional upset into a soft snow-bank is not to be sneezed at

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This course of treatment is only desirable, however, when you are young; when you ride in a farmer's sleigh, with seats ranged on each side of it, a pretty girl seated on each side of you, and your arms — placed there for the purpose of keeping your fair neighbors from falling out — around their waists.

Notwithstanding the absence of Aunt Jeannie, the little ones greatly enjoyed the sleigh-ride; buried in furs, with only their laughing faces visible, they shouted and sung to the merry music of the bells in a most enlivening manner. After a while, however, getting weary, they nestled down into the furs, and were as quiet as so many little mice. The youngest, even, crept softly over to papa and mamma, and, getting between them, went off into dreamland. The sleigh sped along over miles of solitary road, with the snow-banks piled up on either side, or, where it passed over the crest of a hill, with the brown earth cropping out here and there. Sometimes, too, its course lay along the banks and within sight of the ice-covered Bronx, and, occasionally, we would see groups of skaters, and hear their cries and laughter. At such moments the children would rouse up, and, gazing forth, would utter answering shouts. Up hill and down vale, over level plain and through winding lanes, our horses trotted steadily along for nearly two hours, with the exception only of a brief rest at a way-side inn, where we all got out and warmed ourselves, and eat of pumpkin-pies and doughnuts, and drank some sweet cider. The pies and doughnuts were rather frosty, and it made our teeth ache to bite into them. A red-hot poker thrust into the mugs of cider made "flip" of it, and then it was quite palatable. In two of the taverns, where we did not stop, there were sounds of music and dancing going on, and the country lads and lasses were evidently having a jolly time.

It was nearly ten o'clock when we reached home, and deposited the little ones within the walls of our cottage. Aunt Jeannie was sitting demurely before the fire, and on

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the opposite side of the room was that wretch, Frank Brackett, a comely youth of twenty-five years of age, with a very nice moustache and a pair of sparkling black eyes. Close by Aunt Jeannie was an empty rocking-chair, but which, as it was still in motion when I first opened the door of the library and looked in, must have been occupied by some one — I can guess who — but the moment before. I said nothing, though I looked curiously at that chair till Jeannie blushed and Frank looked fiercely at me. I think, from the indications I then perceived, that Aunt Jeannie enjoyed staying at home and keeping up the fires quite as much as she would had she gone a sleigh-riding.

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CHAPTER IX.

THE KETTLE AND THE CLOCK.

"NOTHING can be better," I said, in the hearing of an artist friend, who was passing an evening with me, "than a copper tea-kettle. It is suggestive of so many pleasant and useful employments. To the dear old ladies, who like to assemble around the tea-table, it speaks of steaming cups of Hyson and Bohea; while to the bachelor it is eloquent of convivialities, and the aroma of lemons and the smoky scent of illicit stills fill his senses. What a pity it is that my good wife has no copper tea-kettle!"

"It is so," said my friend: and a short time thereafter a tea-kettle, bronze in its character, of a classical shape, and resting, in a graceful fashion, upon a standard, made its appearance at Woodbine.

To say that my wife was pleased with her present would not adequately express her feelings. She was more than delighted with it, and immediately gave me to understand that I must order a fresh chest of tea from my Chinese importing friend in town. I have already discovered that this tea-kettle is going to be a great source of expense to me. What with my wife's tea-drinkings, to which she invites the neighbors for miles around, twice a day, to attend, and my own predilections for hot lemonade, I am in a fair way to become bankrupt through it. It is a lovely thing, though, perched on a couple of legs, as it were: with a little lamp beneath it, wherewith to heat its contents; and a porcelain handle above it, wherewith to lift it; and a

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curved nozzle, through which the water can run, in a gentle little stream, into the cups and glasses placed to receive it. How my wife, though, — to say nothing of myself, — has managed to get along heretofore without that precious kettle, I cannot imagine. She, probably, has resources in the line of kettles of which I know nothing; for whenever hot water is required, it seems to flow spontaneously, as it is said to do from the hot springs of Iceland.

Not that I am always in hot water, or am forever concocting hot lemonade; but I have never known my wife to fail me, on an emergency, when hot water was required. Even on Twelfth Night, as my friends and I gathered about the mahogany, before there was a copper kettle, hot water, in limited quantities, was available; and, till the cook in the kitchen below sung out, "Hot coppers," the supply was equal to the demand.

"It was a copper tea-kettle, doubtless," I said to my wife, taking my usual stand on the rug before the fire in the library, the other evening, "that that quick-witted youth, Watt, watched, observing the power of steam; and we read that, in some of the inland villages of Africa, nothing is so sought after by the natives, of adventurous explorers, as a copper tea-kettle. Du Chaillu once got a dozen gorillas for one. I remember, in my boyhood, that the copper tea-kettle which graced my grandmother's chimney-corner was an elegant affair, and was scoured up so that it always shone as brightly as a new cent. The kettle that 'began it,' placed on the hob, in Dickens's 'Cricket on the Hearth,' was a copper one, and this brings me to what I have to tell."

"Please, my dear, don't lecture to-night," said my wife.

"Pshaw! listen, my love, to what I have to say. Children, be attentive. Jeannie, don't leave the room; I will have finished before Mr. What 's-his-name calls."

Every one being quiet, I proceeded:

"You may not be aware, my dear," I said, turning to my

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wife, as I spoke, "that I have already christened this bronze kettle?"

My wife said she was not.

"Yes," I continued, "last night, after you had gone to bed, and the house was quiet, and there was only myself and the kettle, so to speak, in the room, it occurred to me that it would be a good plan to boil a little water in that kettle. So I poured some into it, and filled the little lamp beneath with whisky, — not having any alcohol handy, you know, — and started it off on its journey through life. For a while neither of us spoke. I sat watching the blue flame insidiously creeping up and wreathing itself about the kettle — I found that the whisky would not burn well through a wick, so I just turned it out into an open cup and let it blaze away — and doing its best to excite the water inside. At last, when I had about made up my mind that it never would reply to the blaze, it hissed once, as if it were getting vexed, and then was quiet; then it hissed again, and again was quiet; then it hissed two or three times, in rapid succession, and then, for a second or two thereafter, kept silent. Now, however, it started afresh, and went off in a perfect stream of hisses and grumblings and groans, sending the white steam whistling through its nose, and lifting, in a quick, inquisitive manner, its cover, as if it desired to let its contents out upon the world.

"After I had used a portion of it, it grew more composed, and ceased to express itself petulantly, or to grumble and groan; but took to humming, in a sort of runic rhyme, while I sat back in my chair, stirring and sipping the contents of the goblet before me, and eying the kettle with much favor.

"'It is a good kettle,' I said to myself, patronizingly, 'and heats water delightfully, and its bronzed and rounded shape reminds me of the dusky bosom of an Ethiop's bride.' Here the water in it boiled up violently, as if it did not exactly like the comparison I had made."

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"I should think so," said my wife.

"But it soon thought better of it," I continued, "and grew quiet, letting the steam out of its nozzle in gentle puffs, for all the world like the smoke thrown off from the pipe of a half-dreaming Dutchman.

"I found it very pleasant, sitting there," I went on, "stirring and sipping, sipping and stirring" —

"I presume so," interrupted my wife.

"And watching the blue flame sending up its lithe tongues, and the delicate steam curling forth and losing itself in the atmosphere, until, just as I was getting drowsy, the cuckoo clock, with a great whirring and clicking of machinery and a rattling of weights, — for all the world as if a dungeon door was being unbolted and unbarred, to let a prisoner forth, — let its trap-door fly wide open, when out popped the loudest of cuckoos, and commenced cuckooing for twelve o'clock. By the way, my dear, I think there must be something ailing that cuckoo; he appears to have a cold, and I shall have to get my friend Knoedler, of Goupil's, to come out to Woodbine and take a look at him. He must prescribe for him, for his voice is getting to be as hoarse as that of any bird's I have ever heard attempt to sing. Dr. Knoedler must give him a dose of something."

"Oil," suggested my wife.

"Oil it probably is," I replied.

That being settled, I proceeded: "When the echo of that cuckoo song had died away, there ensued a few moments of silence, and then the kettle began to hum in a very cheerful manner. I sat listening to it, stirring and sipping, and sipping and stirring, smiling benevolently and encouragingly all the while, first at the kettle and then at the clock, and really quite pleased with the turn affairs had taken."

"What affairs?" my wife asked.

"Why, family affairs, of course," I replied; "happy

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family affairs — cuckoo kettle living in peace with bronze copper clock."

"Mr. Gray!" my wife exclaimed, reprovingly.

"Well," I replied, apologetically, "that was the way the clock and the kettle got mixed together that night. Each had evidently made a good impression on the other, and, from the moment midnight passed, each seemed to do all it could to be company for the other. From the fact that the clock had been the longest resident at Woodbine, it assumed to do the honors to the new-comer. It appeared to me that, every four or five minutes, it would send out its cuckoo to see how the kettle was getting on; and the kettle, in turn, would lift up its lid and allow a little whiff of steam to escape, which would fly up toward the clock and wreathe itself about its hands, in the most friendly fashion. By and by, the clock, through the cuckoo, of course, would sing out 'Cakes, cakes!' and the kettle, humming away over the blaze, would reply, 'Ale, ale!' And so they kept it up ever so long. Cakes and ale, cakes and ale, they continued to toss back and forth at each other, until which were cakes and which ale I could n't tell."

"I am not surprised in the least at it," said my wife.

"Soon they got to be so very intimate that, to save me, I could n't tell which was the clock and which was the kettle; the kettle cuckooed and the clock hummed and simmered, and all that I did was to just sit still, and, sipping and stirring, look at them. When the clock, however, placed its ivory hands on the rounded form of the kettle, and the kettle held its lid over the face of the clock, to prevent it from seeing what was going on, I felt it my duty to interfere, and I did so. I took the clock down, and put it in the pantry, where you keep the kettle, and I hung up the kettle where the clock had been. 'That is a noisy kettle,' I said, 'and a brazen clock.' And then the moon went out, and the lamp went down, and I came to bed."

"No," said my wife, "you did not go to bed; for Katie

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says she found you in the morning, when she went to make the fire in the library, seated in your chair fast asleep; and when she woke you, you said you would go out and take a walk. Which you did."

"And a very good thing it is to do, my dear," I answered; "especially if you have been up late at night, listening to cuckoo songs and kettle hummings. Besides, I have always heard that an early walk will give one an appetite for breakfast. But, my dear, it is getting late; the little ones are falling to sleep; Jeannie has been listening for the coming of her beau for the last half-hour, and it is time, I think, to have our usual cup of tea. And the new bronze tea-kettle shall do duty on the occasion." Which it did.

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CHAPTER X.

AN OLD STORY, WITH SLIPPERS FOR LUCK.

AN old story — so old that it was told to Eve in Paradise — and has been retold countless times since then — is being once more repeated to a new listener at Woodbine, and, so long as there be fresh, young hearts, soft voices, and willing ears, the story will be told over and over again. Gallant youths take delight in telling it, and fair maidens never grow weary of hearkening to it. Age, oftentimes, finds pleasure in hearing it, and even widows have been known to lend to its recital — though a twice-told tale to them — attentive ears. Time has not tarnished its lustre, nor repetition made it stale. It is never without the charm of novelty, and it stirs the pulses quicker than aught else can do. It makes the voice of the speaker musical, and brings a modest blush to the cheek of the listener. It is the story of love — the commingling of two pure hearts and lives in one.

Day after day, for months past, Jeannie has been learning it. The spring-time saw it open into life; the summer watched its bourgeon and bloom; the autumn observed it ripen, and the winter witnesseth its culmination. Jeannie is a-going to be a bride; and, before the year goes out, I shall have no one to warm my slippers and make my tea and toast for me.

"I don't like these young men," I said to my wife, "who come prowling about honest people's houses, stealing their sisters, and nieces, and daughters, and converting them, in a little while, from bright, merry-hearted maidens, without

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care or annoyance, into weary housewives and rockers of cradles. It does not seem to me right that they should do this, and it appears especially unjust that any one should come here and rob me of Jeannie. I would rather the fellow had taken your spoons — at all events the plated ones — than to be seizing Jeannie, just as I had got her in the way of being useful as well as ornamental in the house. What do you say about it, my dear?"

"Why," replied my wife, "I think you talk selfishly in regard to it. Frank is as nice a young fellow as you will be likely to meet between Woodbine Cottage and any other point, and I am glad that he and Jeannie love each other."

"Oh," I replied, "I don't mind their loving one another; that is a matter of comparatively small moment; but I do mind their getting married, and Jeannie's going away, and leaving me to poke around in the dark after my slippers, and all that kind of thing."

"Nonsense!" my wife exclaimed.

"No, it is n't 'nonsense,'" I said; "and when you get to be as old as I am — provided you possess, too, the natural disinclination I have to play every night at hunt the slipper — you will understand better than you now do the serious inconvenience which Jeannie's going away will cause me. Both morning and night, now for a year past, Jeannie has attended to my slippers, and the result will be that, after she leaves us, I shall not know where to look for them, and shall not have them on half the time."

"There will be less chance, then," said my wife, "of your wearing them to town."

This remark was, I think, uttered a little maliciously by my wife. The fact is, that, one morning not long ago, before the deep snow came, however, the cuckoo clock having gone wrong, — it had been making love, I think, during the night to the bronze kettle, — I was a little behind time for my usual train, and only started for the dépôt when I

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heard the engine whistle to "break up," — going off, of course, in a hurry, and not even stopping to kiss, as customary, my wife and little ones, — and only after I had got into the cars did I discover that I had on my slippers, instead of my boots. I don't know that I should have noticed it myself, but the gentleman, a stranger, who sat next to me, asked, in a very polite way, if I were in the habit of travelling in slippers?

I must say that I was greatly astounded at the circumstance, and I explained to him, confidentially, that I had been sitting up the previous night with a cuckoo clock and a bronze kettle. Whereupon he said "Ah!" in a sanctimonious, white-necktie sort of a fashion, and removed his body into another seat. Whether he thought that I was a lunatic escaped from an asylum, or what, I cannot say; but he kept his eye on me — by twisting his head half-way round, he could bring one eye to bear on me — the greater part of the time, until we reached town. And here, perhaps, it may not be out of place to introduce a little conversation that took place between my wife and myself.

I read to her the chapter entitled "The Clock and the Kettle."

"My dear," she said, when I had finished reading it, "I would n't have written that, if I had been you, for all the world."

"Now, all the world," I replied, "is a good deal; I should have said, as my great-grandfather used to, for a considerable sum of money — leaving the amount quite indefinite, as you perceive; but why, let me ask, would you not have written it?"

"Because," replied my wife, "every one who reads it will think that you were" —

"What?" I interrupted. "Asleep?"

"No," said my wife, "tipsy."

"Nohsense!" I replied: "why I was sound asleep all the while, and I dreamed the whole thing. The truth is, my

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dear, that you jump rashly at conclusions and imagine every body else will do the same. Now, nobody else in the world would have imagined such a fearful thing. My dear, my dear!" I continued. with emphasis, "how could you have thought it?"

My wife looked perplexed, and the subject stopped there, leaving her more than ever mystified. But to come back to my slippers. Somehow my situation attracted the attention of several passengers — rude acquaintances — in the car, and they began to cast jokes at me, asking me if my shoes were water-tight, and inquiring who was my shoemaker, and if there were many more such seven-league boots in the market? One young lady, though, said a very pretty thing about their size, in connection with Cinderella's glass-slippers — I forget exactly how she worded the compliment; but I know it was very neat, and that I felt extremely grateful to her for it.

When the conductor came along — his name is Carpenter — and he is a very excellent conductor, for he always manages to be one or two checks ahead of me on my commutation ticket when it runs out, which is a good thing for Vanderbilt, (thirty cents at least,) he said he must have double fare from me on account of those slippers. I refused to accede to this reasonable request; but offered to apologize for wearing them. He said he did n't want an apology, for he could n't use it anywhere. It struck me that he thought it was a note of hand, — a short note, payable, say in ten days from date, — but he would compromise on a good cigar — which he did. When we arrived in town, I bought a pair of stout shoes, and discarded my slippers.

But let us look to our lovers. Nothing can be pleasanter, unless you be an old bachelor, than taking note of a couple of lovers. Observe how attentive each is to the other. How they anticipate each other's wants, and the care they evince for each other's health and welfare. They

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are very confidential together, and have long talks, wherein their voices sound like the distant humming of bees, so low and continuous are their utterances. I have discovered that these confabs are not always of importance, though conducted with such an air of secresy; for Frank may only be telling to Jeannie the best way of lacing a boot, and she advising him of the mysterious combinations of a plum-porridge. They talk more to the point oftentimes, I imagine, when, surrounded by others, they cast glances at each other across the room. Neither utters a word, but I know that their looks convey a great deal. They express almost an infinity of affection, when they shake hands at parting in the evening. It takes them a long time to accomplish this little duty, and when Frank manages to get Jeannie into the hall, to help him on with his overcoat, the time they consume in bidding good-night — I should not be surprised if he kissed her on these occasions — is something almost marvelous. What they can possibly have to say, after talking together all the evening, passes my comprehension. I think they must repeat over again all that they have been saying during the entire evening, and all, too, that every body else has said. It sometimes makes me quite nervous, seated in the library, to hear the confused murmur of their voices, ceasing now and then, however, for a moment — and those are the times, I take it, that Frank kisses her — and then going on with renewed vigor. Not until I make a move, as if I were going to open the door, and upset a chair or two, does Frank take his departure, and then Jeannie glides quietly up to her room, to listen to the sounds of the footfalls of Frank's horse, as he gallops down the road.

"Oh, these lovers," I said, "are curious people. Out of their minds half the time, harmless, though, as babes, and imagining that all the world revolves around their sweetheart's little finger."

"And so," replied my wife, "it does."

And thus our conversation began and ended.

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CHAPTER XI.

EGGS, HISTORICAL AND FRESH.

"THE spring is coming," I said to my wife the other morning, when, after breakfast, we gathered within the library over the morning papers.

My wife replied, looking through the window at the deep snow which blocked up the gateway, "that she could not discover it."

"I confess," I answered, "that there is a winterish aspect prevailing out-of-doors; but this egg," holding up one which my little boy had just brought in from the hennery, "justifies me in declaring that the spring is coming."

"But it is coming very slowly," said Jeannie.

"Oh!" I replied, "time with you, miss, will creep like a snail until your wedding-day."

Jeannie remained silent.

"Now, I don't mean to say," I went on, "that the daffodils and crocuses have made their appearance, or that the buds are swelling on the trees; all that I desire to suggest is, that spring is coming, and I base my opinion on the arrival of this egg. Hens, my dear, know more than you think for about the seasons. They have their spring-time fancies — and one of their fancies is to lay eggs; and their winter memories, when, it is to be presumed, they recount to one another marvelous feats they have done in the way of egg-laying. Sometimes, though not often, one will drop an egg in mid-winter, even as a happy afterthought is occasionally uttered by a merry fellow, after the feast is over and the ashes are raked up in the fire-place.

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But this is an accident, notwithstanding some of my neighbors tell me that their hens lay splendidly all the year round. My hens, unfortunately, never do that kind of thing, though I have kept them, more or less, boy and man together, over forty years. I know the habits of hens as well, perhaps, as any one who knows as little about them, and I tell you" —

My wife interrupted me to say that she did n't wish me to tell her any thing about it, and she hoped I would not.

"They care no more to lay eggs in midwinter than I do to drink aster ale in midsummer, or eat cakes other than at Twelfth Night. Nature issues her edict against it — it is unnatural; and though, by keeping the hens in warm houses and feeding them well, such things have been made to come to pass, the eggs do not amount to much. They are, as you have doubtless observed, exceedingly watery, and never have any yolks in them."

My wife said she had not observed it; but she presumed I was correct. Any way our hens are early layers.

"Eggs," I said, taking my favorite place on the rug before the fire, and warming, as I proceeded, "are historical. The subject carries us back to what may very properly be called the 'good old times,' when a goose was in the habit of laying golden eggs; and, if it had not been for the avariciousness of one person, who slaughtered that goose in the hope of rapidly making a fortune, the breed might have descended to ordinary times, and those golden eggs would have greatly assisted in paying the income tax.

"Then there were other famous eggs, described in the 'Arabian Nights' — rocs' eggs, as big as a meeting-house, which that clever young mariner, Sinbad, discovered in his voyagings. And speaking of sailors reminds me of Columbus and his little trick with the egg. You remember the story, of course; but, after all, Chris. Col. was a bungler; there was not the least necessity in the world for smashing in that egg at its point, to cause it to stand; for

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observe" — and I took the antipodal Benjamin of the brood, in future, which I had been gently shaking up in my hand as I talked, and balanced it upon its small end on the table. My wife looked surprised; Jeannie asked if Hartz had sent the egg to me; and the little ones, crowding around the table, shook the egg from its poise, and it rolled off upon the floor.

"Now it's broken," said my wife, evidently thinking of the carpet.

"No, it is not," I replied; "porcelain eggs are not so easily broken. And with these eggs," I continued, picking it up, "flattened a little at the small end, one can readily do that which all the wise men, seated around the table with Columbus, failed to accomplish. These kind of eggs too are good to use at Paus; and our little black boy, you will remember, won more eggs at Hillside, of the broad-seated Dutch boys dwelling down in the valley, with one of these porcelain articles, than they, all put together, did of him."

My wife said she was not surprised at it, for that he was always a smart lad. "But, after all, you have not proved that spring is coming; for I have yet seen no freshly laid egg."

"True," I replied, "but you soon will; only give our hens time, and they 'll do wonderful things.

"There is an amusing incident related," I continued, "of a young lady who, seated by an exquisite young man at the breakfast-table, in a country house, declared it to be impossible to break an egg by pressing it ever so tightly, provided you held it in such a manner that the two ends, and no other part, touch the palms of the hands. To prove her assertion — for the nicely-dressed young man was incredulous — she essayed to do it, when, to her dismay, the egg smashed at once, and its contents flew over the faultlessly dressed youth, soiling his clothes and whiskers."

"What a pity!" exclaimed Jeannie.

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"Well, I don't know about that," I answered; "he was, evidently, an egotistical youth who received no more than his deserts."

My wife held her finger up, and reminded me that the Professor would never forgive me if he should learn of my making so bad a pun.

"Do you know," I said, "that I have thought it would have been a great deal easier — to say nothing of the less expense in the matter of feed — for good old Noah to have taken with him into the ark the eggs of the birds, instead of the birds themselves, which he did. He might have engaged a few of the larger birds to hatch them, or he could have buried them in the sands, where the sun would have hatched them, or he might have used artificial means for the purpose."

My wife said it was naughty in me to speak thus, especially before the children.

I said "Yes," and went on: "no breakfast in springtime is complete without fresh eggs. Simply boiled, they are excellent; but, remember, they must be placed in cold water, and allowed to come to a boil over the fire. The plan of thrusting your eggs into boiling water is barbarous. An *omelette* is as delicate a dish — if properly prepared — as one can place before a breakfast guest. The gay and festive Tomaso — who, by the way, ought to write a cook-book, something artistic, I mean — prides himself on his *omelettes*. In his last note to me, knowing full well that the hens would soon begin to lay, he says: —

"'Make thee an *omelette* by beating up, thoroughly and separately, the whites and yolks of six newly-laid eggs; add a teaspoonful of sweet cream, a trifle of salt, and cook in a proper pan, in which there is half an ounce of melted butter, over a quick fire. In order that the *omelette* may remain juicy and soft, it is necessary that the pan should be hot before the eggs are poured in. During the frying, move the pan continually, like your "Ships at Sea," to and

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fro; so that what is below may always come on top again; you may help it with the fork. Continue this till there is formed a cake, four inches in width and one inch thick; now hold the pan still for a moment, to give the *omelette* a color; then turn it out on a warm dish — not a hot one — and serve immediately. P. S.— I need scarcely add that a sprig of green parsley, cut fine, and added to it, improves it.'"

"That sounds," said my wife, "like a good recipe; but where did Mr. Tomaso learn to make these dishes?"

"I don't know," I replied; "but I think he takes private lessons of poor old Palmo. Palmo, who brought the Italian Opera to this country, and who used, in his palmy days, to give grand entertainments and drive a four-in-hand, is compelled now to cook for a livelihood. Tomaso talks about importing ostrich eggs into the New-York market; he says that the contents of one are equal to twenty-five of the domestic hens'. They are very nutritious, and the best way to cook them is to place one end of the egg into hot ashes, open the other, and, through the orifice, stir with a spoon the contents, putting in butter, salt, and pepper. When done, you have a dish fit for a king.

"Eggs, my dear," I continued, "are generally pronounced to be laid by hens; but, in Spain, a superstition exists that eggs have been laid by old cocks. They are usually of very small size, although chanticleer never lays but one. This egg, which it takes seven years to hatch, contains a basilisk, and the first person he sees, on breaking his shell, he 'is able to kill by the power of his eye.'

"At Easter every body eats eggs, and some boys and girls delight in colored ones. Colored red, they are typical of the drops of blood shed by our Saviour, and the custom of staining them, doubtless, arose to commemorate his crucifixion. It is a little singular, though, that colored eggs form a part of all the Malay entertainments in Borneo. Ham and eggs is an honest dish, and, in the prov-

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ince of La Mancha, Spain, according to Cervantes, the phrase, 'The grace of God,' is applied to a dish of eggs and bacon, fried in honey. Suppose, some day, my dear, when eggs get to be a little more plentiful than they now are, that we have such a dish?"

I waited a moment for my wife to answer; but none came. I looked around the room, but she, and Jeannie, and the children were gone. They had slipped out quietly to get ready for church — for it was Sunday morning — and I had not perceived it.

"I forgot to state," I said, — but this time to myself, — "that egg-nog is a good thing."

And so it is.

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CHAPTER XII

SPRING-TIME FANCIES.

"DO you know, my dear," I said to my wife, the other morning, as, throwing up the sash, I looked forth from our chamber window, "that the spring is really here?"

My wife replied that it was hardly apparent as yet.

"Still," I said, "it is the first of March; and I have always read in the almanac that spring commences with the incoming of this month. Now, nothing can be better in the country than the spring. It is better than summer, better than autumn, better than winter. Besides, the air is soft and balmy, and the birds are flying to and fro."

The birds, by the way, were our own pigeons — though I said nothing to my wife about this.

"I think, too, my dear," I continued, "that the breath of jonquils and crocuses is on the air, and I am certain that I smell" —

"Coffee and buckwheat cakes," exclaimed my wife. "Come, my dear, close the window, if you please, for I am getting quite chilled; and, besides, as I know breakfast is nearly ready, I think you had better finish making your toilet, instead of standing longer at that open window."

There is, I am sorry to confess, very little poetry in my wife's composition; though long ago, in our courtship days, she was partial to moonlight nights and to rambling in the woods. Since then, however, she has taken kindly to housekeeping duties; makes excellent coffee, and understands the art of getting up a good dinner. Since the

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Professor came into the neighborhood, she has received a few lessons on this subject from him, and learned how to compose several new and elegant dishes.

"Some of these dishes," the learned Professor gravely remarked, while instructing her, "are even finer than the *opulentum obsonium* of Plautus; or a new and enriched edition of the *lautè vivere* of Terence, who had the benefit of the kitchen of Lælius and Scipio to guide his judgment in matters of culinary refinements. Were it not for the ugly Lucrezia-Borgia-look of the thing, I might say, my dear madam, that he who could not taste of them was in the condition of the dying youth, at Canidia's magic feast, tantalized with the sight of good things, which he might not enjoy:—

"'*Quo posset infossus puer,*
Longo die bis terve mutatæ dapis,
Inemori spectaculo.'

All of which you will find written, my friend, in the fifth of the Epodes of Horace."

This remark of the Professor's, however, which I have introduced in an episodal manner, has nothing whatever to do with the subject of a spring morning, with which I commenced this sketch, though it has much to do with the improved dishes which my wife places before me. So, getting back once more to the open window and balmy air, I remarked, with my head still outside of the sash: "My dear, I think I will plant a few radish and lettuce seeds to-day; for I know how partial you are to both of these vegetables."

"I would wait, if I were you," my wife said, "until the ground is not frozen as hard as it now is. It would require a pickaxe to make an impression in it sufficiently deep to bury even a radish seed."

"Is your husband a fool, my dear," I replied, "that he is not aware of the truth of your remark? Of course, I do not intend to plant these seeds in the garden; but in boxes

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which we will keep in the kitchen, except when the warmth out-of-doors will warrant their being carried forth without injurious results. Already I think I see the green leaves of the lettuce peering above the soil, and forming themselves into crispy heads, susceptible of being converted into a most delightful salad, which, eaten in conjunction with those vegetable strawberries, rosy and tender radishes, born within the earth, forms the freshest and simplest of spring-time dishes. Yes, my love, with my own hands I will, this day, sow the seeds of these two vegetables."

I turned from the window to look at the effect my words had on my wife, who, from her silence, I thought must be delighted to hear that we were soon to have these two dishes on our table, when, to my astonishment, I found that she was no longer in the room. Thereupon I immediately closed the window, and went down into the breakfast-room. The cup of coffee stood beside my plate, cooling; the buckwheat cakes were cold, and my wife had nearly finished her breakfast.

"My dear husband," the gentle woman exclaimed, "what has kept you so long from coming down-stairs? You look as blue and chilly as if you had been kissing a snowbank. I hope you have not been standing before that opened window ever since I left the room; for, if you have, I am fearful that you must have taken cold. I spoke to you just as I was coming down, and thought that you would certainly follow immediately, or I should have sent for you."

"The fact is, my dear," I responded, "I was thinking about the gardening that I would do the coming summer, and what quantities of vegetables I would produce. I was intent upon inventing a hot-bed for the raising of lettuce and radishes, and I thought I would be able, one of these days, to surprise you with them at breakfast. But see, my coffee is cold."

"And here," my wife said, "is a fresh cup, which is hot, and there come some cakes just off of the griddle."

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"Thank you, my dear," I said; "but what have you under that cover?"

"Take it up and you will see," she answered.

I did, and found a few leaves of fresh lettuce and three radishes, about the size of cherries, beneath it. The dear woman had been before me, and performed already what I only dreamed of doing. It did occur to me, however, when I considered the pale and slender character of the lettuce leaves, and the miniature size of the radishes, that she had really planted the seed and gathered the harvest after she went down-stairs, and while I still stood at the window. I suggested this to her, but as she simply exclaimed "Nonsense!" I said nothing more.

Since this surprise, I have several times taken home from the city fresh strawberries and bunches of violets, and pretended to her that I grew them in the garret, under the eaves; but, somehow, she did n't believe me, and quite perplexes me by asking, "How much I paid for them?" I am preparing something, however, which will astonish her one of these days; but, concerning the nature of it, I shall, until then, keep silent.

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CHAPTER XIII.

CAKES AND ALE OF YOUTH.

IN midsummer I took a vacation. That is, I remained at home for two weeks, not going to the city in all that while, and lived on peaches and cream. Of course I had a good many leisure moments on my hands of which the children, with Jeannie at their head, would take advantage, and, crowding around me, insist on my telling them stories. Now, my inventive faculties are none of the best, and my budget of imaginative tales is soon exhausted; but, with a basis of truth to work upon, I can talk until doomsday.

Therefore it was, when Jeannie, perceiving that I could invent no more, slyly asked me if I had had no cakes and ale in my youth, it reminded me that I had, and forthwith began reading, continuing it from day to day, through the warm summer afternoons, seated in the shadow of the apple-trees in the orchard, during the two weeks of my vacation, the following episode in my early life: —

When June came I resolved to go into the country for the summer. As preliminary toward effecting this object, I desired my landlady — who is a widow, and dresses in bombazine — to permit me to pay my board-bill for the preceding month. To this she kindly consented, and I immediately had the satisfaction of presenting to her the amount called for by the account rendered. I sent to the washerwoman for my clean clothes, and, notwithstanding several collars, handkerchiefs, and socks were missing, and

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I had already advanced five shillings to her more than was due, I gave her a gold dollar, for which she seemed to be very thankful. I packed into a carpet-bag, of small dimensions, my modest wardrobe. I bought a straw-hat, a palm-leaf fan, and a box of cigars. I filled the pockets of my summer overcoat with magazines of recent dates, and the evening papers. I took a novel under my arm, and, distributing alms, in the shape of three-cent pieces, to the nine children who board in the house and infest the stairways, as I passed them on my way down, I went out of a place wherein I had dwelt amidst dirt and uncomfortableness nearly six months.

I hailed a passing omnibus, into which I got amidst a sea of crinoline, wherein I was quite hidden, and after a brief ride, which I enjoyed exceedingly, I uncrinolined myself, and stopping the stage, descended therefrom. A short walk through a cross street, and — just before the gang-plank was drawn in — I stepped on board a steamer — one of the fastest boats of the Hudson River — and soon afterward saw the spire of Trinity fade away in the distance. The *bona fide* New-Yorker has great admiration for this well-proportioned steeple. If he be a churchman, he nails his religious faith to the golden cross that surmounts it. If he be engaged in business in Wall-street, he is regulated in his comings and goings by the clock in the tower below it. He considers the edifice itself unsurpassed in the annals of architecture. His highest ambition is to be a vestry-man, or, at all events, a pew owner, in the church, and he believes the way to Paradise lies directly through its vaults, in one of which he would like to be entombed, at the close of life.

As the city disappeared from view, the lofty Palisades presented themselves, and in their shadow, for twenty miles, the boat glided on its course. Gazing on the scenery as it rapidly unfolded itself before me, I quite forgot the evening papers, and was, indeed, fast losing myself in a pleas

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ant reverie, when the tinkling of a hand-bell, accompanied by a polite invitation from a black boy to call at the captain's office and pay my fare, recalled me to the present. Then it was, for the first time, that I asked myself the question, "Where am I going?" To answer this correctly would have puzzled me exceedingly; consequently I did not attempt it, but taking my way to the captain's office, I resolutely requested the clerk to name the price of my passage and I would pay it. He desired, in a somewhat abrupt tone, to know where I was going.

"Why, into the country," I replied, "to pass the summer."

"But at what landing do you wish to stop," he asked.

"It is entirely immaterial to me," I answered, "so long as I spend the summer in the country."

Thereupon the clerk kindly named over the various landing-places at which the boat stopped, and asked if any of them would suit me.

"I had rather not be put ashore at Sing Sing," I said; "but to any of the others I have no objections."

The clerk evidently was puzzled. I think he had an idea that I was a lunatic travelling for the benefit of my health. He said he would speak to the captain in regard to me.

I replied "Very well," and retired to the upper deck, where I watched the sunset, with its orange, and gold, and roseate clouds.

It was not long before I observed the clerk pointing me out to the captain, who, after regarding me attentively from a distance for a few moments, approached me, and, in a kind manner, asked me if he could be of any service to me, as he understood from his clerk that I was undecided as to what place I would stop at.

Thereupon I invited the captain, who was apparently a genial-hearted person, to occupy the seat beside me, and proceeded to tell him I had come on board his boat for the purpose of getting away from the city and into the country;

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"but," I added, "it did not occur to me, previous to starting, that the country was quite so extensive as I find it to be, or I should have decided upon the particular locality I would visit, before I left my boarding-house."

"That certainly," said the captain, with a good-humored smile, "would have been the usual course of proceeding; but I do not know that the mode you have adopted will prove less satisfactory than if you had occupied much time in seeking a spot such as a man of your tastes" — here he glanced significantly at the books and papers — "would desire."

I bowed my acknowledgments of his discernment and he proceeded: —

"Of course you have no wish to stop at a hotel — not even the celebrated ones at West Point."

I nodded.

"A boarding-house in a village," he continued, "crowded with city people, would be equally objectionable, but I think a quiet farmhouse, where an old man and his wife were the sole inhabitants, would, perhaps, be the place for you."

"Not altogether the Utopia, captain, that I have in my mind."

"Ah!" exclaimed the captain, "that word Utopia helps me. Now, indeed, I know the very spot. It is an old-fashioned country-house, lying just at the base of the Catskills, the blue summits of which you may see yonder, traced against the evening sky. The house is full of odd nooks, and boasts a score of chimneys, many of which have been unused for years, and are inhabited by thousands of swallows. It is surrounded by old elms, through the luxuriant foliage of which you obtain charming views of the Hudson, in its winding course along the valley. Then you have the mountains for a background, and a few hours' climbing will bring you to the top of one of their highest peaks, from whence you can overlook almost half the State.

"And such a place," continued the captain, elevating his

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voice, and growing slightly excited, "as the old mansion is, wherein to get the sweetest and richest strawberries and cream, and the lightest biscuits, and the best currant wine and pound-cake ever made, I never in my life knew before."

And the captain fanned himself with an evening paper, in a gentle manner, as if enjoying some pleasing recollections.

"But who lives there?" I asked; "and how am I to find it?"

"Ah! yes," he cried, with a sigh, coming out of his reverie, "I have not yet told you. There is a hale old farmer and his better half, with their two grandchildren — girls of eighteen or thereabout — who are as beautiful as houris, intelligent as sages, frolicsome as kids, and good as angels."

"My dear captain," I exclaimed, grasping his hand, "where is it I must land? I hope you have not gone by without stopping — for of all places in the world the one you have described is the spot for me. But" — I faltered — "are you certain I would be kindly received there? I am a stranger, whom even you do not know, and it would not, under such circumstances, be proper for you to introduce me into any family — much less one possessed of two young and charming ladies."

The captain's brow was clouded. He perceived the force of my remark.

"Will you favor me with your name?" he asked.

I handed my card to him. As he read my name a smile spread over his face, and taking my hand, he exclaimed, —

"It 's all right. Why, my dear sir, I know you very well: I have for years past read your sketches and poems, as they appeared each week in the 'Evening Lamp;' and Kate and Alice — who are very curious, by the way — are both eager to know you. There is n't a man in the world to whom they would give a more cordial welcome than to yourself. And as for the old folks, why, they will be glad

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to see any one whose coming will yield their granddaughters pleasure."

"Dear, delightful old people!" I exclaimed, "I know I shall be charmed with them; and the girls, captain — I think you said they were not ill-natured or uncomely!"

"What?" asked the captain.

I repeated the last part of my remark.

"My dear fellow," he answered, "I said they were beautiful and good as angels."

"Ah, yes," I replied, "I dare say they are — but it will make no difference to me. Young girls are not to be depended upon, but the old couple — I know I shall like them. How long will it be before we get there, captain?"

"Oh, several hours — we shall not get to Kingston before nine, and then we have a ride to take of a few miles back from the river. The girls expect me to-night, and will be watching for my arrival. Come, let us go down into the cabin and have supper." And we went.

When I had finished, Jeannie said that she thought the story opened very well, but she would like to know if it were true, and how long ago it happened.

"It is true," I answered, "but I am not going to confess to you how long ago it was since it happened. To-morrow I will give you another chapter of it.

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CHAPTER XIV.

AN OLD FASHIONED COUNTRY-HOUSE.

THE little ones roused me from an afternoon nap, that so I might fulfill my promise made to them the previous day, of continuing the reading of my spring-time's cakes and ale. So, seating myself on a mossy stone in the orchard, and leaning back against the smooth trunk of an apple-tree, — with the children clustered on the grass at my feet, Jeannie, busied with a bit of ruffling, near me in her low chair, and my wife at the open window close by, — I proceeded with my sketch: —

It was nearly ten o'clock before the captain and myself were on our way to the hospitable mansion which he had kindly selected for me wherein to pass the summer. The road was slightly undulating in character, and ran through cultivated lands, passing, now and then, however, across gloomy old forests, through the foliage of which the moon's rays failed to penetrate. Before us rose the mountain like a vast barrier, stretching on either hand as far as the eye could reach. Here and there, near the road-side or afar off, twinkled the lights of some farm-house, the inmates of which were still astir. Occasionally the bark of a watch-dog, the sound mellowed by distance, fell upon our ears. Several times the unmusical tu-who of an owl, perched on the tree under which we were passing, would startle us for a moment; and once or twice we heard the sharp, quick bark of a fox in the thicket. The frogs croaked in the marshes; the tree-toads, the katydids, and

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the crickets, each added their peculiar notes to the voices of the night. Suddenly, above the brow of the mountains heavy clouds arose, rapidly spreading over the heavens, obscuring the moon and the stars, and almost obliterating from sight the very road itself. Then the wind in great gusts swept through the gorges, and the stoutest trees bowed before it. Their limbs were swayed to and fro, and some were twisted off and sent flying through the air. A few moments sufficed for the wind to expend its fury on the spot where we were, and then it swept by, and we heard it roaring and muttering away in the distance. Its passage was followed by an almost unearthly stillness; then a vivid flash of lightning, instantaneously succeeded by a peal of thunder, frightened our horse into a run; and, just as the rain came upon us, he whirled our light wagon through an open gateway and into a barn-yard, where he quietly stopped — apparently aware he had arrived at the end of his journey. A black boy jumped out of the stable and took charge of the horse; an old man, whom the captain introduced to me as "Uncle George," appeared at an open door, through which a light gleamed, and bade us enter, with a hearty "Glad to see you, gentlemen: walk in, walk in." Nor were we long in availing ourselves of the invitation, but followed our host, who had led us through a long passage, which terminated in the kitchen, from whence we passed into a sitting-room adjoining, where we found a charming old lady, who evidently had just awoke from a nap, and the captain's two cousins, Kate and Alice.

It must be a very pleasant thing to have cousins, judging from the manner in which the captain's welcomed him. They not only allowed him to kiss them, but they actually kissed him in return. It is a number of years since I was accorded a like privilege — not, however, but that I could acquit myself, if such were offered to me, as well as did the captain. I think, indeed, I could do it better. I even

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said as much to Kate and Alice, themselves, but, sad to say, neither offered me an opportunity of proving my assertion. Still they both appeared glad to see me, and I am in hopes that, before my summer in the country is ended, I shall be able to make good my proposal.

The captain was certainly correct in saying that the sisters were both beautiful, and yet they are very dissimilar to each other. Kate, the elder, is a brunette; Alice is a blonde. Kate is regal in stature, mien, and voice; Alice is *petite*, graceful, and *spirituelle*. Kate is more than womanly; Alice is not enough so. Kate is a hardy northern rose; Alice is an orange-blossom of the sunny south.

It was after midnight before the captain and myself retired to our rooms. Kate, Alice, and the old lady, bade us good-night some time previous, leaving the male portion of the party to the enjoyment of a pipe and cigars, — Uncle George preferring the former, we the latter. As the last whiff of smoke disappeared through the open window, each sought his respective room.

My apartment contained only furniture of an ancient fashion, and ornaments that clearly had their origin in the East Indies. A high-post mahogany bedstead occupied a large portion of the room, and was covered with silk curtains, of brilliant colors and odd pattern. Several feather-beds rose like a hill in the midst of it. I contemplated it with wonderment, and could scarcely believe that I was expected to sleep therein. When I sunk into it, I feared I would never be able to get out again. All efforts of mine to woo sleep to my eyes, were ineffectual. Although the night was cool, I felt as if I were in a fiery furnace. I tried all the rules laid down in books to insure sleep, but none proved of any avail. At length, in despair, I rose, and lighting my candle, took an inventory of the contents of the room. I discovered that there were in it five heavy mahogany chairs, rich in elaborate carving; a large bamboo settee, most invitingly cool, stood opposite the bed. On

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the mantel-piece, which was of carved oak, were two massive silver candlesticks, a Chinese pagoda of ivory curiously wrought, and a mandarin standing on each side of it. Over the mantel-piece was a framed copy of Trumbull's "Declaration of Independence;" a series of four pictures, representing as many phases in the history of the Prodigal Son, also hung on the walls; and portraits painted by Paradise, of the old man and his wife, when both were younger than they are now, hung between two windows. In a corner of the room was a set of Japanned trays, and in another stood a large bunch of peacock feathers, their gaudy colors contrasting with the faded papering on the walls; muslin curtains hung at the windows, and swayed to and fro with the night breeze. On looking out of the window my face came in contact with a climbing rose-bush, which left sundry scratches on it of a not ornamental character. I threatened all rose vines with my extreme displeasure, and placing a blanket and pillow on the settee, lay down thereon, and went immediately to sleep.

When I woke the sun was just flooding the room with its matin rays, and I could hear the captain, in the apartment adjoining, humming an operatic air, while performing his morning toilet. Turning to the window, I separated the curtains and looked out. Above me, and almost over my head, appeared the Catskill Mountain House, arrayed in its coat of white paint. I even counted the tall columns that extend the length of the long colonnade. I marked the groups of visitors ascending and descending its wide flight of steps, and who were up thus early to witness a sunrise. Some were clustered in knots of three or four, on the piazza or down upon the table-rock; others — lovers, doubtless — were wandering in couples on the edge of the wood. How many moonlight flirtations, how many mornings' earnest conversations and afternoons' cheerful chats, the Mountain House has been the scene of — I will not attempt to say. I know that I have taken part in

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some with the Kates and Alices of former days. To be sure I was younger and foolisher than I now am, but I would not like to declare that such days will not come to me again — even now, during my summer in the country. But, putting aside the romance of the matter, it is something, believe me, to stand near the edge of the flat rock before the house and gaze down into the valley. A thousand feet below you, the topmost boughs of the forest-trees sway in the summer air. As far as your eye can reach, a seemingly level plain lies spread out before you. Cities, villages, and farm-houses dot its surface; while the broad Hudson, narrowed by distance to a silver ribbon, winds gleaming on its way, its bosom studded with white sails and smoking steamers. Halleck thus immortalizes a similar scene: —

"When life is old,
And many a scene forgot, the heart will hold
Its memory of this; nor lives there one
Whose infant breath was drawn, or boyhood's days
Of happiness were passed beneath that sun,
That in his manhood's prime can calmly gaze
Upon that scene, or on that mountain stand,
Nor feel the prouder of his native land."

The blue haze which colors the mountains when seen from a distance here disappears, and the dark green of the pines and hemlocks that grow upon their sides comes out in its richest shades when viewed from my window. Rough and stern, indeed, the mountains appear, seen from my new point of view. Spots of gray rock start up amidst green boughs. Here and there appear places covered only with low bushes. Dead, unsightly trunks, fire-scorched and blackened, without a single branch, stand, before me, monuments of decay. An eagle rises majestically into the air, floats silently away into the distance, and finally disappears in the dark shadows of the further mountains.

How long I remained at my window, indulging in all

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kinds of fancies, I cannot tell; but the silver tones of a voice, which I knew belonged to Alice, and the sound of a merry laugh, which I was certain was Kate's, recalled me to the present, and completing my toilet, I soon joined the family in the breakfast-room.

Just at this moment an apple, hardly ripe enough to eat, dropped from an overhanging bough upon the sheets of manuscript I held, scattering them on the grass, and warning me that it was time to stop my reading.

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CHAPTER XV.

THE CREAM OF THE JOKE.

ANOTHER half hour in the orchard. This time with Frank admitted to the circle, but with the understanding that he is not to make love to Jeannie so demonstratively as to distract her attention from my story.

My summer in the country is gliding along very charmingly. In the company of Kate and Alice, I quite forget the troublesome affairs of life which I know when a denizen of the city. The thought of my old boarding-house scarcely enters my mind, and the remembrance of the nine children who infested its stairways is buried with other unpleasing associations of the past. Various are the employments that occupy my attention. I am never idle — even when swinging in the hammock, hung beneath the old pine-tree at the back of the house, I am very busy, either smoking a cigar, or reading aloud. At such moments Kate and Alice, seated in the shade below me, occupy themselves in needlework or crocheting; and many are the dainty ruffles their fingers have stitched while I have been thus engaged. Sometimes, as I lie thus indulging in smoking, they sing an olden ballad or antique song till I fall asleep and dream midsummer afternoon dreams. Often, then, they awake me by pelting me with roses, or get the little black boy to come with the "dinner-horn," which he blows lustily, standing near the hammock, till, in despair, I am forced to give up all thoughts of enjoying my nap any

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further. If, however, as sometimes happens, I show no evidence of being awake, notwithstanding the horn, the two girls, aided by the little black boy, sever the cord that holds the hammock, and, amidst shouts of laughter, I am tumbled out upon the soft turf. At such times I, of course, express great indignation at the actors in this naughty deed, and threaten the black boy with all manner of punishment when I catch him. That Ethiopian lad, however, knows enough to keep out of my reach, only showing me his ivories and the white of his eyes. He feels pretty confident, too, that I will do him no harm, as he knows well enough that his young mistresses will shield him from all danger. The little black boy is a general favorite with the inmates of the old house, notwithstanding he is mischievous to a degree that renders him at times rather a terror than a comfort. Still he is a convenient institution to have around, and knows how to apply the Japanese polish to my boots with marvelous skill. When it is too warm for either the brunette or the blonde to venture upon the hill-side to pick strawberries for the table, the black boy is called into requisition, and, if he don't cease his work to chase a squirrel, or to search for birds'-nests, he generally proves to be very successful in the strawberry business, and comes home with heaping baskets. To my taste, the wild berries that ripen up here on the mountains are more delicious than the cultivated ones of the valley. So, too, in some respects, are the mountain maids, Kate and Alice, superior to the young ladies who are bred in the hot-houses of the city. Not but that the "rose" and the "orange blossom," as I sometimes name them, are acquainted with life in the city; but it is only in the winter-time, and the rest of the year is passed by them in the midst of mountain-air and scenery. True, they are apt to run rather wild at times. Like young Lochinvar, "They stay not for brake, and they stop not for stone," and I think they would swim a river if ford there were none. Under the guidance of

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the little black boy, they have been known to climb trees; and as for scaling fences, he must be an agile youth who proves himself more skillful.

When I joined them at the breakfast-table the morning after my arrival, they were telling the captain of an adventure they had lately had in the mountains. They had been running at will all day, and late in the afternoon turned their steps homeward. After a while it became evident to them that they had lost their way. There were no familiar landmarks to be seen. They were in a wood in which the trees grew high and close, so that they could see but a few yards in advance and catch only glimpses of the sky above. To add to their dilemma, clouds overspread the heavens, and the night was approaching. Alice declared she had half a mind to sit down and cry, but Kate said she had no idea of giving in in that way, but was determined to discover their whereabouts. All she wanted of Alice, she remarked, was for her to assist her to climb a certain tree which towered above its fellows, from the top of which she was sure she could discover some familiar locality. So, laying aside a certain expansive garment, which would be superfluous, not to say inconvenient, in climbing, Kate successfully ascended the tree, and obtained from the summit such accurate bearings as enabled her to convey Alice and herself safely through the four miles of forest and clearing that lay between them and home.

"It is not every girl," said the captain, regarding Kate admiringly, "even if she be born and educated in the country, who would have thought of doing as you did, and much less been able to perform the feat."

"Many, like Alice," I added, "would have been inclined to despair, and, perhaps, have lain down and died like the two babes in the wood, of whom we read in the nursery tales, and like them, too, have been found covered with leaves, the work of robin-redbreasts."

"There was great judgment evinced, too," said the old

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man, complacently stirring his coffee with his spoon, "in Kate's laying aside a certain garment before undertaking to climb the tree. Even Blondin, who jumps through a hoop, I believe, while walking the tight-rope, would be puzzled, I imagine, to climb a tree if he wore a corrugated steel spring skirt."

The girls both colored slightly at this remark; the captain slyly laughed; the old lady exclaimed, "There, there, father, that will do," while I unconcernedly drank my coffee and ate the cream toast before me.

Speaking of cream, reminds me that no one who lives among brick walls has any knowledge of it. Rich, thick cream, such as the old lady pours over my strawberries, was never seen in cities. If by any chance it should ever get there, it would be worth its weight in gold, and no one who is n't in the custom of purchasing hot-house strawberries at five or six dollars a basket, could afford to use it.

When I asked the little black boy, at milking time, which of the cows it was that gave the cream, he pointed out a vicious-looking creature, with short horns and a thick neck, fastened to a post by a chain which was attached to a ring in its nose, that stood pawing the earth with its fore-feet, and lashing its sides with its tail, in a most frightful way. Approaching it very carefully, I waved my handkerchief in a conciliatory manner, and said, just as I had heard the black boy speak to the other cows, "Good bossy, cushy, cushy, so!" when, as if possessed by the Evil One himself, the ungrateful animal roared aloud and made a rush at me, and, if the chain which checked its onslaught had not been formed of superior steel, would doubtless have brought my summer in the country to a speedy and unhappy termination. The moment I recovered from my astonishment and alarm — I confess I was alarmed — I turned toward the little black boy, whom I found lying in a "select pile" by himself, his head in the milking-pail, and the milk itself saturating his clothes, while the cow

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which he had been milking was in the act of leaping the five-barred gate of the barn-yard. The poor creature, frightened by the bellowing and sudden rush of the other, had dashed away from the black boy, upsetting the pail and leaving him in the plight above described.

When I told "Uncle George" of this barn-yard episode, he laughed heartily, and said the little black boy was rightly punished for the deception he had practiced on me.

"The little wretch!" I exclaimed; "in what way did he deceive me?"

"Why," he answered, "that is no cow he pointed out to you — it is my celebrated, imported Devonshire" —

I did n't wait for the old man to finish his sentence, for, catching sight of the black boy entering the barn, just as the truth broke upon me, I started for him with a view to punishing him as he deserved. Fortunately for the colored youth, he had vanished from view amidst the hay before I could reach him.

Where the cream comes from still remains a mystery, which I hope to discover before my summer in the country is ended.

The shadows were beginning to lengthen in the orchard, when, with the children accompanying me, I returned to the cottage, leaving Frank and Jeannie behind us pulling buttercups and daisies.

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CHAPTER XVI.

BITTER CHERRIES.

THE sun shone fiercely, and there was no breeze stirring, when, on the fourth day of our reading, we sought the shadow of the apple-trees. "It will be well," I remarked to Jeannie, "if we get through these few pages without being driven into the house by a shower."

"But I see no signs of rain," she answered, "though I am sure I wish we could have a little. The flowers need rain sadly; my pinks are withering, and my tulips cannot hold up their heads."

"Your cheeks are pink enough," I replied, "and your two lips are really pouting for Frank to kiss."

"For shame!" she said, turning scarlet; "go on with your story," and I went on: —

I scarcely know which I like the more — the northern rose, Kate, or the orange-blossom, Alice. In the morning, when the air is fresh and cool, and I am ripe for adventures, nor deem any mountain peak too high for me to scale, then I like the vivacious Kate; but in the afternoon, when the shadows lengthen, and the sunshine flickers lazily through the leaves, and the valley slumbers in the warmth, then I prefer the quiet Alice. So it often happens that I wander off in the forenoon with Kate, and follow the brook up to its source in the mountains, and there, standing beside a blasted pine on the edge of a precipice, we watch the eagle's flight, or count the hills that lie between us and the Hudson; or, seated on a storm-beaten rock, I tell her

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of strange adventures experienced in distant lands, and wind up, perhaps, with "sad stories of the death of kings." But when the twilight comes, it is Alice who goes with me to the spring down in the valley, and, while she weaves into a wreath the flowers we plucked on the way, I tell her a fairy tale, or, it may be, whisper a love-story in her ears. Kate's dark eyes flash with excitement as I talk to her on the mountain-top; but the blue eyes of Alice grow dim, and the soft light that shone in them fades out, and the white lids droop, when she and I are alone together down in the valley. Kate requires no assistance from me either in ascending or descending the mountain; but Alice clings to my arm when we walk through the darkened woods and the meadow, in going to and returning from the spring.

Heaven only knows how my summer in the country will end. Perhaps, if the Captain were with us, it would not then be so difficult for me to decide between the rose and the orange-blossom. I mean whether I like one more than I do the other. I think the Captain's mind is "made up" on this subject, and after he had carried off my rose, I should, doubtless, regard my orange-blossom more tenderly. Some persons believe it to be as easy to love two women as one, provided each possesses distinct attractions. For my part I do not believe this, and consequently, the feeling I have for Kate and Alice, although akin to, is not yet, love. I confess, however, I am sometimes tempted, when seated alone with Kate on the mountain-top, to omit the story of the death of kings, and in its place narrate the history of a living heart and lay the same at her feet; but somehow the remembrance of Alice, who will look for me to accompany her down in the valley at the twilight hour, deters me; and the only proposal I make her is one in regard to our returning home. When with Alice, too, the temptation is often mine to ask her to be my wife, but I as often seem to hear the leaves of the trees above us murmur, "Not yet; not yet;" and I heed the warning, and when I walk

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homeward with Alice, it appears as if she and I were never to be more than friends.

The sentimental vein that was mine when I closed the above paragraph, was put to flight by the appearance of my young sable friend, who, rushing into my room without ceremony, informed me that the young ladies were both in the trees picking cherries, and wanted me to assist them. It immediately occurred to me that if a young fellow desired to hold a private confab with a lady, there could be no more desirable place than the bough of a cherry-tree for such an interview. I must have uttered my thought aloud, for the little black boy said, "Dat's so."

"What is so?" I asked.

"Why," exclaimed the sable youth, no ways abashed, "making love to young lady, to be sure, in cherry-tree: oh, I knows all about it."

"How do you know about it?" I asked.

"Because, sir," he replied, "I 've done it."

"Tell me of it, then," I said, putting aside my pen, and taking my hat, preparatory to visiting the cherry-trees.

"Why, you see, sir," said the black boy, wiping his forehead, "last summer a little yellow gal was here from the city, and I liked her. One day I caught her in the cherry-tree, so I got up by her side and helped her pick. I gave her just the nicest and biggest cherries that were on the tree, and when I thought she had had enough and felt kind o' satisfied, and did n't want any more, I asked her if she 'd have some more; and she said 'No,' just as I expected; and then I said, 'Will you have me, Susie?' and she said 'No,' just as I did n't expect; and then I shook the limb she was on, and she fell down on the ground, just as she did n't expect — and that's why I think cherry-tree good enough place to make love in."

"Especially," I added, "when there is any likelihood of one's being refused."

"Dat 's it exactly," said the cunning little black boy.

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Whether the story told by the sable youth had any thing to do in deterring me from making a similar proposition to either of the young ladies, whom I found comfortably seated in different trees, plucking and eating the rosy fruit with evident relish, I will not say. I was quite puzzled, as I approached, to know into which tree to get — whether I should assist Kate or Alice to pick cherries. I stated openly my dilemma, and asked them to decide the vexed question.

"Oh!" exclaimed Kate, "there need be no trouble in the matter; all that you must do is to get into the tree that stands between Alice's and mine, and then we can both see and chat with you."

As the advice seemed good I followed it, and thanked Kate for cutting the gordian knot.

"Never mind thanking me until you know my advice to be good," she cried, laughingly. By this time I was in the tree, and selecting a limb, near which hung the most delicious looking cherries ever grown, I prepared for a feast.

"Eat now," exclaimed Kate, "and be very thankful."

"Really, Kate, you 're too bad," cried Alice, from the neighboring tree.

But why she was "too bad," I did not at that moment understand, though it was apparent to me in the next. I have taken many bitter pills in my life, but I never swallowed any that were half as bitter and disagreeable as the cherries that grew on the tree selected for my especial enjoyment, by Miss Kate. I bit into several before I came to the conclusion that all the fruit was similarly obnoxious; but Kate's laughter, and Alice's regretful tone as she repeated the "too bad," left me no reason to doubt the fact.

Just at that moment, too, "Uncle George" came along, and he told me not to be diffident about helping myself to all the cherries I wanted. He only hoped, though, that I liked them, for it was n't every one who tried that tree, who took kindly to the cherries that grew there.

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"They are noble-looking cherries," he continued, "to be sure; but, to my taste, they are a trifle too bitter for every-day use — but I 'm glad you like them. Stick to 'em, my boy, for there is n't a shadow of a sickness in a bushel of them — which, however, is more than I can say for those of the tree that Kate is in; and as for Alice, why she knows very well that those great ox-hearts will affect her own heart in a very curious manner. I should n't wonder now, if she fell in love" —

"Pray, Uncle George," said Alice interrupting him, "don't say any thing more, and I 'll go with you down into the meadow to see the men cutting the hay."

"I, too," exclaimed Kate.

And the next moment the two were on the ground and beneath the bitter cherry-tree, inviting me to join them.

There was nothing for me to do but to follow their example, and so, leaping from the tree, I declared my willingness to go wheresoever they led. Alice had a little basket of ox-hearts which she had gathered with her own hands, and which she gave me as a peace offering for the part she had taken in the bitter trick played upon me. So, at peace with Alice, if not with Kate, Alice and I walked side by side down into the green meadow.

As I concluded, the big drops of a summer shower came pattering upon the leaves of trees around us, and caused us to gather up our paper and work, and hurry into the cottage. Then the rain came down in torrents, and made the grass to look green, and the flowers to hold up their heads, and all Nature to sing Jubilate.

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CHAPTER XVII.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE "FOURTH."

MY eldest boy has discovered an easy seat, so he says, in the apple-tree, under which I read my "Cakes and Ale" of youth, and regularly seats himself therein. If it were not that he causes me an annoyance by occasionally shaking down the ripening apples upon my head, and also distracts the attention of the little ones from my reading, as they rush forward to pick up the falling apples, I should allow him to retain his place in the tree; but, as it is, I shall, I fear, be obliged to request him to take a lower seat.

Long before the Fourth of July arrived, — I read, resuming my sketch, — Kate, Alice, and myself, were engaged in making preparations for celebrating it in a patriotic and becoming manner. After many and pressing importunities from various persons living in the neighborhood, I at last consented to compose and deliver a poem suitable for the occasion. Now, I do not believe that my *forte* lies in writing nor yet pronouncing Fourth of July odes. Indeed, I think they have hitherto proved to be failures. The little black boy, moreover, asked me, when I had read this ode to him, one rainy day, in the barn, previous to its delivery in public, if it were intended for a funeral sermon, and whether the President and the American eagle were dead. Perhaps little black boys are not good judges of these compositions, for Kate and Alice, to whom also I read it, both pronounced it "exquisite!" but "Uncle

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George," however, shook his head gravely, and said he had heard better ones, he believed, in his lifetime. At all events, I devoted nearly two weeks to its composition, and gave my entire mind to its construction, and if it were not good, at least it was not my fault.

On account of the scarcity of gentlemen in the vicinity, I was also invited to deliver the usual oration, and read the Declaration of Independence. Declining this excess of honors, the committee, Kate and Alice, pressed into the service as orator a young Virginian, whom they encountered one day whipping a stream for trout — a species of fish, by the way, of which the brook is entirely guiltless. He was staying at the Mountain House, and though he designed departing before the Fourth, yet, if the young ladies desired it, he would remain and serve them to the best of his ability. "But you know," he said, turning to me, "as you were my companion at college, that my oratorical powers are not of the first order."

"You may not," I replied, "as an orator, be equal to your distinguished namesake, Patrick Henry, but as a descendant of his, your patriotism, I presume, cannot be questioned."

So it was settled that the young Virginian should be the orator of the day. Then the Captain, who brought us a supply of fire-works from the city, was prevailed upon to assume the post of reader, provided the girls would contribute their share in the exercises, and sing one of General Morris's national songs. The music to be provided for the occasion was left to the little black boy, who, fortunately, owned a large bass-drum, with which he designed to furnish many of the popular airs of the day. "Uncle George" was unanimously elected "Marshal," and promised to appear in the cocked hat and knee breeches which his father wore during the Revolution. The old lady, assisted by Dinah the cook, declared she would get up a dinner equal to the occasion. The *programme* being

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thus satisfactorily arranged, it only remained to obtain an audience. This proved to be no easy undertaking. It required several days to be spent by Kate and Alice in visiting the neighborhood for miles around, giving out invitations, and explaining the whole matter to every one whom they met. At the close of the first day they had obtained but three spectators. To be sure they had only called on two families, though they had been absent an entire day. They had thought it best to visit their far-off neighbors first, leaving those near by to be visited last. Their first call was made on two maiden ladies, who dwelt at the extreme verge of their visiting circuit, nearly eight miles distant. It was ten o'clock before they alighted at the hospitable door of these maiden ladies, and nothing would do but Kate and Alice must remain and dine.

It is customary in this part of the country, when you drop in on neighbors, in an unceremonious way, to assist them in whatever household duties they may be engaged. It chanced to be washing-day with the two maiden ladies, and they were on this account doubly glad to see Kate and Alice. Fortunately for the latter, the heavier pieces had undergone the proper ablution, and only a few caps, such as old ladies wear on grand occasions, remained to be "done up." Kate, for her part, declared the caps had not been included in "the wash," until their arrival suggested to the maiden ladies the propriety of so doing.

After the clear-starchers had performed their little task with the caps, and assisted in shelling some pease for dinner, they finished their labor by setting the table. While the dinner was cooking, the maiden ladies were "slicking up;" and so, while Kate told the errand they had come upon, the former, with a desire to economize time, seating themselves in their rocking-chairs, which they kept constantly in motion, proceeded deliberately to comb their heads with fine-teethed combs. On my remarking to Kate that this was a pretty way of employing one's self,

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she assured me it was the custom among the unrefined people of that vicinity. I have since verified the truth of this by personal observation.

It was two o'clock before Kate and Alice left the home of the maiden ladies, and proceeded on their way to the next farm-house. Here they were obliged to stay to tea, which they assisted in getting, and watched the females of the household go through the rocking-chair and fine-comb practice. The entire family, however, were going to New York to spend the Fourth, to see the fire-works in the Park. John, the eldest son, a young fellow of nineteen or twenty, whom Kate tells me is in love with Alice, declared his intention of not going to the city, however, but to "Uncle George's" instead.

Just as Kate and Alice had driven away from the horse-block before the door, after tea, on their way home, the mother of John rushed out of the house and called for them to stop. The horse was reined in. The mother of John stood panting at the side of the wagon.

"I do guess," she said, "that ef one o' you gals was to ax the cap'n of the steamboat to carry us to York for nothin', why he 'd go and do it. And I 'm sartin we and our John would be much obleeged. John 'll send both o' you a basket of prime harvest apples, jest as soon as they 're ripe, ef you 'll only get the cap'n to."

Kate promised the good woman to speak to the Captain, but told her that as he was intending to spend the Fourth in the country with "Uncle George," it were doubtful if he could oblige them.

For a week the girls were visiting the neighborhood, in the business of collecting an audience to unite with us in celebrating the anniversary of our independence. Each night they returned from their visitings, weary, but amused with what they had encountered. Sometimes I accompanied them, but oftener they went alone. I was busily engaged in composing my poem for the occasion, which,

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with the thermometer ranging from eighty to one hundred, was a task not easy of accomplishment. Once, too, the black boy, when I was the most troubled for ideas, commenced practicing "Yankee Doodle," or "Hail Columbia," on his confounded drum, directly under my window. When I told him to cease, and advised him to go to a distant part of the farm, where he would not disturb any one, he was impudent enough to declare it to be a free country, and he 'd play where he liked. A boot-jack, aimed at his head, but which struck the head of the drum, settled the question, and necessitated the drum's being taken to New York, by the Captain, to be repaired.

At the same time I commissioned the Captain to purchase a pair of cymbals for the little black boy, as he had expressed contrition for his impudent language, and had begged my pardon. Since the arrival of the drum and cymbals, the lad practices night and day in the barn, and expects to be the chief attraction of the Fourth. He places the cymbals on his feet, holds the drum-sticks in his hands, and thus makes music on them both at the same time.

"What was done on the Fourth, Miss Em," I said to the young lady of this name, as she suggested to me the propriety of continuing my reading, "will be told to-morrow."

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CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FOURTH OF JULY.

"FOURTH of July," I said, unrolling my manuscript, and seating myself under my favorite tree in the orchard, "is the best 'cakes and ale'-day in the calendar of our country. It is the most patriotic day in the year. It commemorates the greatest of events in our history. When the American eagle, spreading his pinions"—

"My dear," said my wife, at the window, interrupting me, "please don't repeat that oration, which I remember to have heard you deliver more than a dozen years ago, just now; but let us hear another chapter of your story."

"As you please, my dear," I replied, and then I proceeded as follows: —

The Fourth of July came in all its glory. Its arrival was welcomed by the little black boy at an early hour — say three o'clock in the morning — with the discharge of a pack of fire-crackers thrown from his bedroom window, the noise of which effectually awoke the inmates of the house; and as the misguided youth followed up the first pack with others at intervals of ten or fifteen minutes between, till the sun appeared, any further attempt on their part to sleep again was entirely useless. Perhaps it will be as well to mention here, that an additional reason for remaining awake may be found in the little circumstance of the black boy's playing, between the explosions of the crackers, — which, by the way, were his individual prop-

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erty, purchased with the proceeds of a sale of eggs recently effected by him, — upon the drum and cymbals in a laudable and patriotic manner.

As the first rays of the sun, however, fell on the highest peak of the Catskills, the ebony lad suspended his orchestral efforts, and proceeded to the barn, on the roof of which he had erected a rude flag-staff, which he immediately decorated with the well-known Star-spangled Banner — the handiwork of Kate and Alice. A little mismanagement on his part enabled him, on this occasion, to run up the Stars and Stripes in an inverted position. When I saw this flag of distress flying, I was afraid that something unpleasant in its nature had occurred; I wondered if the Fourth had been postponed to another day, or if the little black boy had fallen from the roof of the barn and broken his neck. I was relieved of this latter doubt, however, when I noticed, perched on the ridge of the barn, the black boy engaged in loading an old musket, preparatory to firing "the salute at sunrise." Before I had reached the barn he had finished loading, and placing the breech of the gun to his shoulder, fired. I thought of the recoil. I looked up and through the smoke I saw the young soldier's feet playing for a moment in the air, and then they disappeared. The old musket slid down the roof on my side of the barn and struck the ground at my feet, and, a moment afterward, I heard the little black boy strike the ground with a *thud*, on the opposite side of the building. I looked at the musket; it was evident to me that its last shot had been fired. It had gone safely through the wars, but it had never before fallen thirty odd feet. Its stock was broken. Suddenly it occurred to me that something in the black boy might have broken. I started to go around the barn to see. Before I had gone, however, many steps, I encountered the lad playing frantically on his cymbals. Hereupon I came to the conclusion that falls of thirty-five feet never injure little black boys. When, however, I

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came to investigate the subject, I decided that after all I might be mistaken. I found that the roof on one side of the barn sloped down to within eight feet of the ground, and it was that side which the black boy selected for his gymnastic feat.

When I pointed out to the Ethiopian lad the position of the American flag, and told him to reverse it, he said he guessed not; it was no kind of consequence which side was up, so long as it waved.

"Besides," he said, "I is n't going to risk my life again on that slippery roof without pay for any body. I 'd like to see Blondin do it, but not dis child."

I had actually to give that monkey fifty cents before he would do my bidding.

Just before breakfast the Captain, who likes the short-cakes and corn-bread, and the coffee, with its accompaniment of rich cream, which the old lady provides on such occasions, made his appearance, bringing a further supply of fire-works. Shortly after breakfast the neighbors, whom Kate and Alice had invited to be present, began to assemble. Among the first who came were the two maiden ladies, in a gig which once belonged to their father, who, in his life, had been the most skillful physician in his part of the country. Indeed, the daughters thought they each inherited some portion of his skill, and were fond of giving advice in cases of illness. They were, in fact, regarded by young mothers as indispensable assistants on certain occasions.

By noon there was an assemblage of fifty persons. The young Virginian had arrived, accompanied by several gay ladies and gentlemen, who, like himself, were sojourning at the Mountain House. They were full of fun, and entered cordially into the spirit of the occasion. When the procession was formed to proceed to the grove, where the exercises were to take place, the two maiden ladies occupied the position of the customary old soldiers, who, on

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like occasions, always have a prominent place assigned to them. Their right to this honor was founded upon the circumstance of their having seen Washington. When, however, I inquired into the particulars regarding their interview with the "Father of his Country," I discovered that it was Washington Irving they had met instead of the hero of the Revolution.

"Uncle George," as the marshal of the day, was a most conspicuous personage, and attracted universal attention. The black boy vacillated between his cymbals and drum, and succeeded admirably in playing no tune whatever, though he essayed various marches and quicksteps. Arrived at the grove, the exercises were opened by a patriotic prayer from the Methodist minister, who strangely mingled Gideon, Pharaoh, Samson, Goliah, and the stripling David, with Washington, Napoleon, the Duke of Wellington, Garibaldi, and General Walker. When he ended, Kate and Alice sung the Union Song, which was encored, and the chorus shouted by the entire assembly. Then followed the reading of the Declaration, by the Captain, which was listened to with marked attention; even John, the son of his mother, was charmed with it, and asked me if the Captain wrote it. The Virginian, the orator of the day, then delivered an eloquent oration, short, but replete with wit, humor, and good sense. After another song by Kate and Alice, I recited, in a low tone I fear — for I heard calls of "Louder!" "Louder!" proceeding from the assembly, but to which I paid no attention — the poem prepared for the occasion. I am sorry to be obliged to say that it was not encored, but if the enterprising editor of any journal will give me twenty-five dollars for it, I will remit it to him by return of mail for publication, so that his subscribers may have the benefit of its perusal. Another ode was sung by Kate and Alice, succeeded by a benediction from the parson, which closed the exercises in the grove.

The black boy immediately struck up the music upon

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the drum and cymbals at the same moment, playing them in an original and bombastic manner, while lying on his back on the sward.

Seeing the black boy in this position, I induced John, the son of his mother, to throw a pack of lighted crackers into his vicinity — the effect was instantaneous, and the little black boy turned several somersaults in various directions as the crackers exploded around him.

From the grove the procession returned in admirable disorder to the house, where the old lady, assisted by Dinah the cook, had prepared a dinner eminently worthy of the occasion, and to which full justice was done by the guests. Many bottles of champagne were emptied, a barrel of crab-apple cider was broached, much small ale was disposed of, and large quantities of tea were imbibed by the old ladies over their cakes and pie.

But the evening witnessed the greatest display. Fireworks of many kinds, Roman candles, rockets, wheels, and other pieces unknown to me by name, were discharged, till the air was filled with shooting stars; nor was this all, for, just as the party broke up, a huge bonfire, made of a hundred forest trees, lighted the multitude down the mountain road. A thousand tongues of flame filled the air, and streamed high up into the sky. This light was seen for miles around, and for nearly three hours it burned with undimmed brightness. Then it slowly faded, flickered with an uncertain glare, and when the midnight came, and the glorious Fourth was passed away, it gleamed a mass of red and glowing coals; and so the day and the bonfire ended.

"That is a pretty good story about the black boy," said Frank, who was one of my audience, when I folded my manuscript, "but when I was with Sherman during his great march to the sea, I met many funnier black boys than he. There was one named Tomothy the oddest of black boys."

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"What a singular name! Tomothy," said Jeannie.

"Yes," replied Frank, "and this is the way he happened to get it. His mother intended to call him after his father whose name was Thomas, and his uncle whose name was Timothy. But the old colored preacher, when he came to baptize him, was a little obfusticated with hard cider or something stronger; and, unwittingly, run the two names together, and so the picaninny, before even his own mother could interfere to prevent it, came out of the preacher's hands Tomothy for life."

Whereupon we retired in good order into the house.

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CHAPTER XIX.

BRAWLING BROOK.

ANOTHER reading in the orchard, cut short, however, by a sudden shower, which sent us scampering into the house. Even Frank and Jeannie failed to linger as they were wont, to eat the cakes and drink the ale of courtship.

Since the Fourth of July went into routine, as the fashion articles read, we have lived a quiet life at the old mansion up in the mountains. To be sure, the little black boy is as mischievous as ever, and plays all kinds of tricks upon the various inmates of the household. Kate and Alice, too, for the past week have been returning the calls of the neighbors made on the Fourth, but their visits have been attended, I believe, without any very gratifying results. John, the son of his mother, has called upon Kate, and, at her request, written the following verses in her album, which lines he declares to be entirely original: —

"Some peonies are very red,
Likewise some poppies, too;
The sunflower always turns its head,
And keeps its God in view.
I know I, like these flowers, blush
Whenever you I see,
And tears into my eyes will gush,
To think you don't love me.
And as sunflowers obey the sun,
I'd do the same for thee."

While Kate appreciates, in a certain way, the above production, she is inclined to make fun of the author; but

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of the young Virginian, who, previous to his departure, also wrote some verses, which are embalmed in her album, she is more reserved in her speech. It was only after urgent solicitations that I obtained a copy, made by the fair hand of Alice, of his poem, which, as I think it worthy of wider circulation than it will be likely to have if retained in her album, I here transcribe. I may be accused of violating good taste — not to say friendship — in thus publishing it; but as the author hinted to me that he had used it on former occasions, that it was, in fact, a little thing which he kept in his pocket-book for special purposes of a similar character, I may, perhaps, be forgiven for thus presenting it to the public. Of the two poems — if either be a poem — the former is doubtless written more sincerely, though less finished in its style than the latter, which is entitled,

WE MET.

We met as other friends have met,
  We parted as friends often part,
A smile, a gay adieu, and yet
  Her face is mirrored on my heart.
'T was June — a night in pleasant June —
  When first she came upon my sight,
And in the sky the crescent moon
  Shed round her form its gentle light.
Another's voice fell on my ear,
  Another's hand was on my arm,
Yet could I only feel and hear
  The touch and voice that wrought me harm.
That wrought me harm! Yes, I, till then,
  Had moved along a beaten way;
Had travelled on with common men,
  Nor cared to hail a better day.
I was contented, nor did ask
  For any happier lot than mine;
But life is now a senseless task,
  While that I crave is most divine.
And what, I ask my throbbing heart,
  Of this to me will be the gain?
And when and how will it depart,
  Nor leave behind a sense of pain?
That I have risen from the clod,

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That I have gazed upon the sun,
And seen the trailing robes of God
Foreshadowed in my life begun,
Is not enough for me to give
The peace that crowned my other years:
I ask for something else to live
Than merely for vain hopes and fears.
I ask fulfillment of the hope
That springs unchecked from high desires;
Else why this amplitude of scope,
My fancy grasps from love's fierce fires.
No lesser place within my breast
Should she possess than that of wife;
Upon no arm but mine should rest,
Through the sweet journey of her life.
Be this to me or naught, I say;
Fulfill this only hope and prayer;
Else dash my cup of life away,
And curse the earnest love I bear.

Notwithstanding the violence of my friend's passion, as evinced in the above poem, he departed apparently in the best of spirits, *en route* for Saratoga. Neither did Kate appear to be especially affected, but performed her daily household duties in her usual manner, singing as she went about them, and only listening for the approaching carriage wheels on those nights when the Captain was expected. Then, to be sure, she was more quiet than at other times, and liked best to sit upon the wide piazza, over which clambering roses grew, that stretched along the side of the house nearest to the road.

As for Alice, the orange-blossom, she had no one to write verses to her — no one for whose coming at night she looked; so it often happened that she and I would wander off together down into the meadow, just at twilight, to taste the waters of the spring; or in the morning, when nothing better offered, she would take her work-basket, filled with a dainty bit of muslin, which in some seemingly miraculous way would be converted before our return into a delicate and pretty ruffle, and accompany me to the "Brawling Brook," a half-mile distant, where trout were to

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be caught. Not that I ever took many, however, for my skill as a fisherman is very limited, though I like to read the "Complete Angler," and have much regard for Izaak Walton. Indeed, whenever I open this pleasant volume, no matter where it may be, I am immediately, in thought, conveyed to the side of a running brook, near the side of which daisies, cowslips, dandelions, and violets bloom; and when I hear the songs of birds in the woods, the dashing of waters over slippery rocks, the low murmuring of the breeze through the forest, the humming of bees, and the quick splash of the frog from off the slimy log where he has been enjoying midsummer dreams; and I can see, too, in the deep and shady pool the timid trout gently moving his fins above the sandy bottom. Where, except in Walton's volume, do we read such meek and kind-hearted expressions of contentment; such cheerful piety, and such true and pleasing descriptions of rural scenery? Surely "all true men who love quiet and go an angling," must find in him a worthy companion. I can easily imagine the home of Walton and his companions, when distant from the "Wayside Inn," where they were wont to get a cup of "red cow's milk," to have been —

"A straw-thatched shed;
Leaves were their wall, and sea-weed was their bed.
. . . . hard by were laid
Baskets, and all their implements of trade;
Rods, hooks, and lines, composed of stout horse-hairs,
And nets of various sorts, and various snares;
The seine, the cast-net, and the wicker maze,
To waste the watery tribes a thousand ways;
A crazy boat was drawn up on a plank;
Mats were their pillows, woven of osiers dank;
Skins, caps, and ragged coats a covering made:
This was their wealth, their labor, and their trade."

But I have almost forgotten Alice, who, I said, accompanies me sometimes when I go a-fishing. I usually, on these occasions, take with me the last new book, brought by the Captain from the city, which I read aloud from. As

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I look out of my chamber window, while I am writing this, I see, although the hour be late, the shadow of Alice's profile traced upon the curtain of her window, bending over a book which she holds in one hand, and that book, which so deeply interests her, must be the one we commenced reading together this morning. I will tap on my window-pane, tell her it is late, and promise to finish reading the volume with her to-morrow. And I did so.

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CHAPTER XX.

THE DEVONSHIRE LOOSE.

MAMMA, as well as the children, is getting interested in my story; Jeannie, too, takes pleasure in listening to it; and as for Frank, he attends as regularly and listens as attentively as did Shahriar to the recital of the one thousand and one tales of the Arabian Nights. My wife has the coolness, even in this midsummer weather, to say that it is not for the hearing of the story that he comes, but to see and be with Jeannie.

When I come to recall my own courtship days, I am not certain but what, after all, my wife is right. But, at all events, Frank keeps track of the story, and as we smoke our cigars together on the veranda, in the twilight, he gives me his ideas as to how it ought to end. But to continue the narrative: —

It is not an agreeable occurrence to have a pleasant *tête-à-tête* with a young lady interrupted by an arrival of a third person. Especially is it so, I think, when that third person is a little black boy, when the young lady is Alice, and I am the party of the first part. Notwithstanding my repeated injunctions to the Ethiopian lad on no account to make his appearance before me, when I was alone with Miss Alice, either while in the house or out-of-doors, he has failed to obey me. Twice has he interrupted me at the very moment I was about to mention a few facts to Alice, in relation to my prospects in life. On the first occasion — it was just after the glorious Fourth — I was seated beside

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Alice, on the piazza, enjoying, among other things, the bright moonlight. I had, to some extent, been indulging in quotations from the poets. I confess I chose them with a certain object in view. They all were, more or less, upon the subject of love. I had just quoted a pretty stanza from Coleridge's "Genevieve," when fizz! crack! bang! bang!! went a package of fire-crackers, under the very chair in which I was seated. Alice, frightened, ran screaming into the house, and I, getting sight of the black boy as he dodged around the corner of the piazza, dashed after him. It is a very difficult thing, however, to catch little black boys, I find, especially if they get the start of you a few rods; but I was very determined, and rushed here and there among flower beds, and through rose-bushes filled with thorns, and finally brought up, or rather down, in a glass-covered hot-bed, where some choice vegetables were being forced. With hands and face scratched and bleeding, and in no enviable temper, I returned unsuccessful to the house, where I found the little black boy in the kitchen, busily scouring his cymbals, and looking as innocent as a lamb. When I asked him why he played this trick on me, he said he never did it. And the cook assured me that he had been in the kitchen with her all the evening, and only went out when he heard the sound of the fire-crackers, but had returned immediately, and told her he guessed the York gemmen, meaning you, sir, she explained, had got burnt, for he was staving around like mad. "And that's all he nor me knows about it, sir," she added.

Here was a dilemma. If it were not the black boy who had set off those fire-crackers, who, then, was it? There was but one other person in the household whom I could suspect, and that one was Kate, but neither she nor Alice could I find again that night. The next morning, however, at the breakfast table, my suspicions were confirmed in regard to the criminal, by Kate's asking me, as she saw me sip my coffee:

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"What is hotter than love?"

"This cup of coffee," I replied.

"No," she answered, laughingly; "fire-crackers."

I will be even with Miss Kate one of these days. In the mean time, let her do her worst.

Another occasion on which the little black boy made his appearance when I was alone with Alice, was a glowing afternoon toward the latter part of July. Alice and myself had gone through the path in the woods, down to the spring in the meadow. We had talked together of many things, from those far distant to others close by, and little by little, I had drawn the thread of converse to the subject nearest to my heart. I do not know exactly what I should have said, but at the moment I opened my lips to speak, the black boy, fearfully excited and out of breath, stood before me, his cymbals in his hands. I could have demolished that little black boy with a good will; and as he stood there, essaying to recover his breath, his eyes starting from their sockets, his mouth wide open, displaying a valuable set of ivories, and vainly endeavoring to utter some word, I felt that nothing would give me more comfort than to throw him head first into the spring, and fasten him down with the cymbals. A moment's more silence on his part, and I should have done it. Luckily for him, however — luckily, perhaps, for Alice and myself — he managed to exclaim, "Run, run for your lives."

At the same instant a sound resembling distant thunder fell on our ears. Alice and myself involuntarily looked up at the sky. It was clear; not a cloud was to be seen. We turned to the black boy, who pointed through an opening in the bushes, to the end of the meadow, where we saw, evidently working himself into a furious passion, "Uncle George's" celebrated imported Devonshire bull.

The Devonshire commanded the outlet of the meadow, and unless we could reach the shelter of the woods without being observed by his lordship, our chances for escaping

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unharmed were, as the black boy arithmetically stated, "as ten to nothing." His calculation may be all wrong. I dare say it is; but it puzzled me at that moment, and has continued to do so to the present, to understand by what process of mathematics he was enabled to arrive at this result.

But the time I had to spare to investigate this subject on that occasion was quite limited, for Alice, as if in duty bound to do so, immediately screamed, thus attracting the Devonshire's attention, and utterly destroying, in my opinion, the truthfulness of the little black boy's calculation. As if to convince us, beyond doubt, of this fact, the Devonshire shook the folds out of his tail, stuck it up like a liberty pole into the air, thrust his head, ornamented with a pair of short but available horns, toward the ground, and with a roar started toward us.

"Now run for it," exclaimed the little black boy. "You look out for Miss Alice, and I 'll look out for the bull."

And we did so.

Away we went to the nearest point of refuge across the meadow, Alice showing as neat a pair of ankles with dainty feet attached as one ever sees of a rainy day in Broadway. But those little feet, it soon became evident to me, were not accustomed to the pace they were going. In fact, Alice began to lag. Not so the Devonshire. He had four legs at his command, and was used to the exercise. Indeed, his leaps were terrific. He gained rapidly upon us, and unless something very unexpected turned up we should, probably, be performing a similar movement ourselves. I 've seen Blondin do his little trick at Niagara, and was not surprised to witness his success. His agility is wonderful, but if he were placed in a close field with a wild Devonshire, his agility would, I think, prove of no avail. I remember saying something like this to the little black boy, in a confidential way, as we were exerting ourselves in that meadow. I don't think the lad paid any attention to my remark, notwithstanding I heard him say,

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at the moment I took Alice into my arms to carry her, "I guess I 'll take that fellow by the horns."

Twenty feet yet lay between us and the fence, near the woods, which, if gained and crossed, would place us in safety. Alice had fainted and lay powerless in my arms. I could hear the quick, plunging tread of the Devonshire close behind me. I felt that escape was out of the question, and that, in another minute, the animal would be on us. At this instant, a sound, sharp, ringing, and not unmusical, fell on my ear. I turned, and looking, saw the little black boy, standing not five feet from the Devonshire, which also had paused in his flight, deliberately playing his cymbals, not, however, I confess, keeping as good time as he did on the Fourth of July. The Devonshire had evidently been taken by surprise; and though he did not appear to be partial to the music, he yet stood still and endured it.

By the time I had reached the fence, and deposited my precious burden in safety on the farther side, the Devonshire had turned his back on the black boy, and was walking deliberately away from him, looking around occasionally as he went, as if to make sure, by observation of his adversary's movements, that he was not looked upon as retreating in an altogether undignified or foolish manner.

When his lordship had gone a safe distance, the little black boy ceased and came running toward me. The moment he did so, however, the Devonshire whirled around and put himself into an imposing and belligerent attitude; but on the black boy's resuming the cymbals, his lordship, apparently satisfied that no disrespect was intended him, moved slowly off again.

I think the little black boy was frightened — I am certain I was, and so, I know, was Alice; but it required a good deal of courage to turn and face, as the black boy did, that fierce animal, not knowing but that death would be the result. I have come to the conclusion that the little black boy dearly loves his young mistress, Alice.

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"By George!" exclaimed Frank, as I finished, "how I would have liked to have been in your place."

"With Alice?" I asked.

"Well, no, not exactly," he replied, "but with"—faltering—"Jeannie."

"I am much obliged to you, I am sure," said Jeannie; "but if I may be allowed to study my own comfort, I should not care to have been in Miss Alice's slippers."

"Oh! of course not," answered Frank. "I was only wishing — that is, I mean, if" —

But here the tea-bell ringing, the conversation came to an end.

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CHAPTER XXI.

SNAKES IN THE GRÀSS.

"NOT that I think," I said as I unrolled my manuscript, "that the above title is an altogether proper one for the chapter: for the snakes were only supposititious ones, and had no existence except in the brain of Dinah, the black cook."

"Then why," my wife asked, "do you give it such title?"

"Simply," I said, "for lack of a better: but listen while I read it to you."

It is very warm in the country during the month of August, even here among the mountains. To be sure, the nights and early mornings are cool; but in the middle of the day the heat often is of the most fiery description. The little black boy, however, seems to enjoy it, and takes his *siesta* at noon, stretched at length upon the haymow, in the field near the house. When I asked him, the other day, why he did not seek the shadow of a tree in which to take his nap, he said it was because there were not enough flies in the shade.

"Flies!" I exclaimed; "why, I should think you would avoid them as much as possible."

"Oh, no," he answered: "dis child likes flies, 'cause they tickle him so. Don't you like to have them creep over your face, and hear them buzz?"

"I cannot conscientiously say that I do," I replied.

"Well, I does," he continued. "You see, I sleep with my mouth wide open, and when I wakes, I generally finds it full of flies."

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And the little black boy snapped his teeth together, as if indulging in a pleasing recollection of a vanished meal.

"There is no accounting for tastes," I said. "When 'my Uncle Toby,' in the kindness of his heart, made the memorable speech about there being room enough in the world for himself and the blue-bottle fly that annoyed him, he had no idea, little black boy, there would ever be any one who, like yourself, could find comfort in destroying them."

"I s'pose not," said the black boy. Then, after a pause, he added, "That Uncle Toby of yours must be a pretty good man. I guess I 'd like to live with him."

"He would prove to be a kind master to you, my little black boy," I said.

"He could n't be no kinder, though," he added, "than 'Uncle George,' and I rather guess I can't go away from here; for, you see, there 'd be nobody to keep an eye on that Devonshire if I should."

"No one to do the 'chores,' either," I suggested.

"That 's so," said the black boy, meditatively. "I wonder who would chop the wood in the winter, and milk the cows, and feed the pigs; and then at killing-time! — well, after all, 'Uncle George' could n't get along, no how, without me, so it 's no use saying any thing more about it."

And the little black stuck his straw hat on the side of his head, in a knowing fashion, and marched off with a consequential air, to the barn, in search of fresh eggs, while I took my way toward the house.

Seated on the piazza, in the shade, I found Kate and Alice bending their heads together over a new novel, which had been sent to me that afternoon, with others, to review. They scarcely acknowledged my greeting, so absorbed were they in its pages. Had it been Alice alone who was thus engaged, it would not have arrested my attention, for she is partial to reading, and devotes much of her time to it; but Kate prefers other employments, and

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will at any moment throw down her book for the sake of a ramble, or even a chat with me. On the present occasion, therefore, my surprise was great, when, on proposing to Kate that we go "a-blackberrying," she declined, and said she preferred remaining at home and reading, to going out to pick all the blackberries that ever grew, but that Alice would go.

While Alice was gone to her chamber for her brown hat, I sought out the little black boy, and giving him a "quarter," told him he must not, on any account, follow Miss Alice and me into the fields, but that he might get his cymbals and practice "Love not" on them, in the arbor, near the piazza, which, if he did, I had no doubt but Miss Kate would give him another "quarter" to go away.

The black boy laughed, and said he would try it; "but," he added, "suppose the Devonshire gets loose again, had n't I better follow you and Miss Alice then?"

"No, little black boy," I said, "not if all the bulls of Bashan should get loose, need you appear."

But how futile, ofttimes, are our best arranged plans. Just when we think our ships, which have been so long at sea, are coming safely into port, laden with priceless treasures, a storm arises, and in sight of the wished for haven we see our noble vessels wrecked, and the untold wealth they carried swallowed by the waves. Nothing quite so unfortunate as this, however, happened to me; but having made my arrangements for keeping the black boy at home, I had a right to expect, I think, that the little conversation I desired to hold with Alice amidst the blackberry bushes, would have taken place without interruption. But it appears that fate was against me. I should not like to believe that fate is only another name for Alice; but I confess it looks extremely like it. It did not appear in this light to me at the time; but now, as I think the matter over carefully, it favors that supposition very strongly. I noticed, just as we were leaving the house, that the black boy spoke

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to Alice, and she stopped a moment while replying to him; but I thought little of it till I observed she appeared vexed, and, as we walked slowly down the road, kept looking back, apparently watching for some one. No one came, however, and I was congratulating myself on having for once got the black boy out of the way, when, just as we reached the first blackberry bushes, and I was preparing to introduce a topic of conversation which would ultimately lead to the one I desired, who should make her appearance, panting and blowing like a great sea-calf, but Dinah, the cook.

"Law sakes, Miss Alice," she cried, as soon as she could speak, "is that you, honey? I 'se so glad to see you, for I 'se bin most frighten'd to death 'bout dese rattlesnakes, as the folks says is up in dese mountain."

"Oh, Dinah," said Alice, "you are very foolish to talk about snakes; but if you 'll keep close by me, I 'll promise that none will touch you."

Dinah did keep close to Alice. And I scarcely spoke a word till our return to the house. I asked Dinah, though, why she left her ironing, which she was busy with when Alice and I came by the kitchen window, for the sake of picking berries, particularly if she were afraid of snakes.

"Ha, ha!" she cried; "I thought you 'd ask that. Why it was just a freak of mine, honey, dat 's all."

"I thought," I replied, "you might think, Dinah, there were other snakes than those that creep in the grass, and so came to protect your young mistress from them."

Alice blushed, but said nothing.

Dinah exclaimed:

"Law sakes, what a funny man!"

"How little able," I thought, "we innocent, unsuspicious men are, to read the heart of a woman. We know where to look for diamonds, for gold, for silver; but for that true affection, which we prize more than all earthly treasure, there are no landmarks, no light-houses, no polar stars, by which we may be guided to it. We float, apparently, at

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random, on shoreless seas, and if, finally, like the ark, our hearts settle down upon some happy Ararat, it is not because we select our own haven, nor guide our own bark."

"It was a black snake, after all," said Frank, as I closed my manuscript, "and black snakes are worse than the" —

"Frank!" exclaimed Jeannie, holding up her finger rebukingly.

Frank stopped short in his remark.

"It was too bad," said my wife, after a little pause, "that such a nice *tête-à-tête* party should have been interfered with, but I suppose another opportunity occurred?"

"We shall learn that in due time," I said, and then we went into the house.

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CHAPTER XXII.

THE PAST AND THE PRESENT.

"MY dear," my wife said, as she sat by the window looking out on the orchard and fanning herself, — for the afternoon was very warm, — "please do not prelude the forthcoming chapter with any long and learned remarks, for if you do, I shall not be able to endure it; so be as light and cheerful as you can."

'Why don't you," asked Frank, "follow my example?" and he held up to her gaze a tall goblet filled with an icy compound, and crowned with green spears of mint.

My wife, with disapproval on her countenance, shook her head.

"My dear," I said, "I don't know how you discovered it, but I really did intend to enter into a philosophical dissertation upon the origin of love, but I believe you are right in thinking it to be too warm for a display of learning." So, without further preface: —

My summer in the country is drawing to an end. It is mid-August, and before many days September will be here. Already I hear the crickets singing autumnal songs, and the katydids join in the chorus. My old landlady in the city, too, has written me a letter, asking when I intend to return, and if she shall reserve for me my old apartment. I fairly shuddered when I read her epistle, for I could not bear the thought of returning to a boarding-house. The remembrance of the nine children who infest the stairways, and their indulgent, but sometimes fretful

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mothers, whom I should have to encounter if I went back to my old quarters, made me wish always to remain in the country. At the best, a boarding-house is an uncomfortable place; and after enjoying, as I have, all kinds of home-comforts here in the country, the idea of going back to the dreariness of boarding-house life is any thing but pleasant. When I spake something like this to "Uncle George," as we sat around the wood-fire — it is cool enough in the evenings to have fires — in the kitchen, the other night, he wanted to know why I need go back at all.

"Are you not comfortable where you are, my boy?" he asked.

"Certainly," I replied; "but, then, every one goes back to the city at the close of summer."

"Not every one," he answered, "for Kate and Alice will remain here, and they will manage to enjoy themselves, too, as long as they stay."

"That you may be certain of," said Kate.

"Yes," added Alice, "we can always enjoy ourselves where Uncle George is."

"And so can I," I exclaimed.

"Then why not stay with us?" he asked.

"Why not?" chimed in the old lady.

"Oh, do," said Kate.

But Alice uttered not a word.

Had the latter ever so slightly evinced a desire for me to remain, I am certain I would then and there have decided not to return to town; but she did not so much as lift her eyes from the purse, or whatever it might be, she was crocheting and apparently her mind was far away from me and my desires. The black boy even had something to say in favor of my remaining, and remarked that if I went there would be no one to teach him to play new airs on the cymbals.

But what was the use, I thought, of staying in the country, if Alice did not care to have me. So I said, "No; when September comes, I must leave you."

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"But there are two weeks between now and then," I said to myself, "and in that time who knows what may occur?"

That night, after all the household, save myself, had gone to bed, I sat by the dying embers musing of the days of long ago, when I loved one who was, in many respects, the counterpart of Alice. Her name, even, was the same, and, like the present Alice, she was a blonde, with blue eyes, light hair, and slight frame. In one particular, however, she differed from the "orange-blossom" of to-day, inasmuch as she loved me. Her letters, tied together with a faded blue ribbon, which I keep in my private desk in the city, tell me this whenever I read them; and as I there sat, pondering on the past, I wondered why it was I had grown so forgetful as to let the love I once bore her turn into a fresh channel, and flow toward a new heart. What if the sweet-brier had many times bloomed above the mound under which she slept! What if its roots struck deep into the mould that covered her, and she herself — the lovely, gentle being, whose hands I had clasped, whose lips I had pressed — had long since turned to dust? Was it well for me thus to forget her? What if eight years had passed since I kissed her cold lips, as she lay shrouded in her coffin, vowing in my heart to be true to her forever.

"Were these years," I asked myself, bitterly, "the 'forever' which I then meant?"

"What were years to her?" I thought; "what, indeed, are they to any one who has passed from earth? Nothing, absolutely nothing; for with the dead, time is annihilated; but with the living," I exclaimed, "ay, with the living, years are every thing; and while we live," I thought, "we should endeavor to enjoy ourselves and be happy, as far as lies in our power; and we cannot be happy," I added, "unless we have some one to love us — some one whom we can love. The memory of a buried love is not sufficient. Youth cannot exist on memories. It may satisfy the old, who

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stand with one foot, as it were, in the grave; but the young, with a prospect of long life before them, desire something more than is wrapped up and hidden in the past, to sustain and enable them faithfully to perform the duties of the present."

With these thoughts, and such as these, I absolved myself from my old allegiance, and gave my heart and my love to Alice.

knew not, indeed, if she would accept them. I even feared that she would not; but I resolved that night, while sitting before those smouldering embers, that, come weal or woe, before my summer in the country were ended, I would tell her of my love, and win or lose a heart.

I stirred the brands, as I arrived at this conclusion, and there sprang up a cheerful blaze, which I welcomed as an omen of good fortune.

I was not aware how long I had been musing over the past and the future, until the clock on the stairway, striking four, recalled me to the present. Silently I arose and sought my room. Before I slept, I heard Dinah calling up the little black boy, and saw the gray light of morning coming dimly and silently in the east.

I was late at breakfast, and found, when I made my appearance, that Kate and Alice had gone to the village with "Uncle George," nor were expected to return till evening.

When I asked the black boy why he did not wake me, and let me know that his young mistresses were going to the village, he replied that Miss Kate wanted him to do so, but Miss Alice objected, saying that you had been sitting up all night, and it would be a shame to arouse you.

"How did Miss Alice," I asked, "know I was up all night?"

"I dunno," he answered; "'spose she guessed it, and that's all I know about it."

Nor could I learn any thing more from the sable youth, though I spent most of the day near him, instructing him

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in various branches of education, to say nothing of a lesson on the cymbals, which he sandwiched in between his arithmetic and geography.

Late in the afternoon, "John, the son of his mother," made his appearance with a basket of harvest apples for Kate, which he declared were the finest that grew in the State. He was sorry, he said, that Miss Kate was absent, and he kinder guessed he 'd better stay to tea. So he and the old lady had a long talk together, which both, apparently, greatly enjoyed.

At last Kate and Alice came, and I thought the latter seemed to greet me with more kindness than she had before in a long time. But they were both wearied with their trip to the village, and as soon as the "son of his mother" departed, they pleaded weariness, and retired to their room. There was a gentle glance in Alice's eyes, as she bade me good-night, that spoke the feeling of her heart more plainly that many words could have done. And with that look I was contented.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

HOW WILL IT END?

"WHAT is what I have been asking myself, for some time past," exclaimed Frank, as I read aloud the title of the present chapter, "though I suppose," he continued, after a slight pause, during which he glanced tenderly towards Jeannie, who sat turning, unconsciously, around her finger a large diamond ring, "that it will end in the usual way, with a marriage."

"Of course," said Jeannie, blushing. My wife sighed. It was not a sigh of sadness, so much as one called forth by memory — the memory of our own courtship days, and the certainty that we could never live them over again. It is useless to deny the fact that those spring days of love never come twice to the same hearts. The love which follows marriage is what summer — the glorious prime of leaves and flowers — is to the year, for it is the culmination of much joy and happiness. So, the fulfillment of marriage — the completion of the Home, made so by the presence of children — may be compared to the autumn of the year, when the bounteous earth gives forth her increase — when the barns burst out with plenty and the presses overflow with good wine. After this, there not infrequently comes a season when the joys of life are turned into woes: sweetness is changed to bitterness, and smiles give place to tears. The loved one is laid to rest under the sod, and the storm beats upon the rounded grave. This is the winter of life, with its blinding snows and icy blasts. There is, after this, little left of cheer or comfort for the lonely

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one. The snows may sift, the winds may blow, and the midnight darken the earth, but the stricken heart neither heeds nor sees these things. I said something like this to my wife, and though she did not reply, I could understand that she felt that each season of life had its pleasures, the spring, the summer, the autumn, and even the winter.

Then opening my manuscript I read: —

"Heaven only knows how it will end!" I exclaimed, as I went forth alone, the other morning after breakfast; for Alice had declined to go with me, and Kate I had not asked. "Heaven only knows how it will end!" I repeated, as I sauntered, in no enviable mood, down the path leading through the meadows to the spring, where, seated by the side of Alice, I had passed so many happy hours. But all these happy hours seemed fled forever. Alice, even, was changed, and, I could see, avoided being alone with me. I feared she did not love me. Once I had thought otherwise, and that she found delight in being with me; but that time, I felt, had gone by, and now I was nothing more to her than were many others.

It was no easy matter for me to bring myself to believe this. I struggled against it, and tried to make myself think that it was only a maiden shyness. She has read her own heart, I said, and she finds, to her surprise, that she loves me. This knowledge has alarmed her. It is something strange for her to feel that there is one, in no way akin to her by birth, in whom she takes a more than friendly interest, a more than cousinly regard — ay, a more than brotherly affection. But will not this feeling, I asked myself, which has startled and shocked her very being, pass away in a day or two, and leave her heart free to turn with its store of trusting love to him who has called it into being? I essay to bolster my hope up with these reflections, but in vain. The scales will fall from my eyes, the mask will drop from before my face. It is useless, I say, for me to

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think any more about her. She does not love me, and I am once more a waif upon the stormy sea of life.

Seated near the spring, I recall to memory other loves of mine which long ago were buried in the past. Foremost in my mind rises the thoughts of my love for that other Alice, whose mortal part lies in a village church-yard, in a valley far away. I seem to be living over again, to a certain extent, the sorrowful days which were mine, when they told me that the Alice whom I was soon to have called my wife was dead. I felt then the world had no balm that could heal the wound in my heart. I doubted if I should ever smile again. I could not understand why life and its duties never ceased a moment in those around me, when I was so bowed to the earth with sorrow. I looked for the sun to stand still, for the moon and the stars to forget to shine; and because they did not, I thought it strange. I would have had all the inhabitants of earth clothe themselves in sackcloth, and put ashes on their heads, and would have deemed it to be only a proper expression of sympathy and regret on their part. Of course none of these things occurred, and I, even, in a short time, learned to smile again, and believe in the continued blueness of the sky and the greenness of the earth. My appetite, too, was better than in former times when I sighed and worried over her declining health. I remembered all of these things while seated by the spring, and I said, though the present Alice may be forever lost to me, I cannot grieve as I once grieved, nor will I remember as I once remembered. And yet I love Alice, if not with the warmth and ardor of that other love, still with equal purity, and even greater stability. That was more imaginative than this: this possesses more judgment than that.

Having arrived at this satisfactory conclusion, I look at my watch, and find that my morning has passed in a somewhat unprofitable manner, perhaps, and that noon has arrived. The primitive habits of "Uncle George" and his

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household are such as enable one to dine at twelve o'clock. At the very moment, then, in which I look at my watch, I know that, unless something unusual has occurred, the family is being called to dinner. "Uncle George," previous to asking a blessing on the repast before him, has waited a moment for me to make my appearance. The little black boy is probably despatched to my room to call me, and when he returns with the information that I am not to be found there, there are some exclamations of surprise from all, except Alice, who is occupied in breaking her bread into crumbs, and apparently totally oblivious of my absence. Then the dinner goes on without me. I picture all this in my mind as I walk rapidly toward the house, nor did I deem myself much mistaken when, on gaining the dining-room, which I do before the first course is off the table, I am greeted with questions as to where I have been, and notice by the side of Alice's plate a heap of bread crumbs, which are crumbs of comfort to me. As for Alice herself, she says not a word, but the heightened color on her cheeks, and the all-but-untouched food on the plate before her, convince me that I have occupied no small share of her thoughts. My hopes, arise, too, as the appetite of Alice returns, and though she scarcely speaks during the meal, I catch a glance of her eye, which has an assuring look, and leads me to think that all may yet be well.

"Heaven knows how it will end though!" I thought, as I rose from the table, and marked Alice flitting out of the door before me. I must have uttered my thought aloud, for the old lady, who is slightly deaf, on hearing the word "heaven," supposed I was returning "thanks," and immediately responded with an — "Amen!" I could not help but smile at her mistake, and so did "Uncle George;" but neither of us explained the matter to her, and so in blissful ignorance she went into the kitchen to call the cook to "clear off the table."

When "Uncle George" and myself were seated on the

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piazza that afternoon, smoking, he asked, in a knowing tone of voice, "How what will end?"

"The world," I made answer, "and the people in it."

"Or rather, you should say," he replied, "the little love episodes that arise to break the calm current of our lives."

I was silent.

"The fact is, my boy," he continued, after pausing long enough to surround his brows with a cloud of smoke, "I see and understand it all. You and Alice are both sitting on thorns, and my advice to you is that you settle the little matter between you this very day. 'Let not the sun go down upon your wrath,' is very good advice; but, for my part," and here the old gentleman shook the ashes from his pipe, "I don't know that it 's any better than this — which of course you will own is entirely original, — Let not the moon go down upon your untold love;' put that into your pipe, my boy, and smoke it." And "Uncle George" entered the house to take his after-dinner nap.

As the advice which had just been given me was not bad in its way, I resolved, if opportunity favored, to follow it, and if no opportunity presented itself, to make one, even if I had to carry the war into Africa, which meant up to my lady's chamber.

All through the afternoon, like a wily spider watching for his fly, I swung in my hammock, under the swaying shadows, catching glimpses of the sky and the drifting clouds and gleams of sunlight through the green leaves above my head; but never a sight of the white-robed Alice came to gladden me. The butterflies flitted from flower to flower, the humming-birds darted hither and thither, the swallows flew in and out of the open barn, the over-ripe harvest apples fell one by one, the reapers in the wheat field on the other side of the lane whet their scythes ever and anon, the woodpecker tapped and drummed upon a neighboring tree; but the nest of the dove was not rifled, the orange-

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blossom was not plucked, though the sun was sinking, and the crescent moon was drooping toward the west.

"The end," exclaimed Frank, as I ceased reading, "is most assuredly approaching, and promises to be satisfactory."

In which opinion the others acquiesced.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

WHAT CAME OF IT.

THE children woke me from my after-dinner nap, sooner than I liked, to have me continue my story.

"There is very little more to tell," I said, "for every one knows how it ought to end, and — but listen."

The sun went down, and the young moon, after coquetting with the twilight, was slowly following it to rest. One by one came forth the stars. The voices of the night-time were heard. The chirp of crickets, the cry of katydids, the song of tree-toads, the piping of frogs, the wail of whip-poor-wills, and the tu-hu of a solitary owl, mingled with the murmur of the evening wind through the tree-tops. The crescent moon dipped its outer edge beyond the rim of the mountains, while I, still swinging in the hammock, waited for the coming of Alice. "Let not the moon go down upon your love untold." I repeated these words over and over again to myself, but no Alice made her appearance. In despair, I exclaimed aloud, "Alice! Alice!" Instantly I heard beside me a rustling sound. I turned my head, and the white-robed Alice stood before me.

"You called me, I think," she said.

I answered "Yes," and leaping from the hammock, I placed her arm, which she did not withdraw, in my own, and turned with her into the path that leads down to the spring in the meadow. As we walked onward, the moon

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seemed to linger above the mountain-tops as if loth to depart until it had listened to the tale of love which it knew must be revealed.

For some time we moved on in silence. There was no fear in my mind now of the result. I felt certain that Alice loved me. She had not uttered as much; but her confiding manner, and the smile that glowed on her face when she turned her eyes to mine, told it as plainly as words could have spoken. But the happiness of hearing her lips breathe the one word, which, beyond all others, I most desired to hear, urged me on to tell my tale of love and win from her a like avowal. And then and there, walking in that forest, just as the young moon, gleaming through the leafy branches overhead, sunk behind the mountains, I told her of my love, and asked her to be my wife. And when her sweet answer came, as come I knew it would, I sealed the bond with a kiss, such as only can be known to those who win a heart.

With our hearts overflowing with happiness, we stood beside the spring where we had passed together so many joyous hours. We had much to say to each other, and the time flew all too swiftly with us. Heedless of the falling dew, and the increasing lateness of the night, we thought but of each other, our love, and the present moment. The future, if it entered our minds at all, loomed up only as a far-off, although glorious, country, wherein we were to live in the sole enjoyment of each other. Its cares and perplexities were unrevealed; its dark spots were hidden, and its pleasures and joys alone stood forth, in the bright and glowing light which surrounded us.

How long we would have remained oblivious to all persons and affairs, save our own, I cannot tell — probably for a century or two — had not the stillness of the night been suddenly disturbed by a most outrageous noise, which startled Alice, and for a moment alarmed me, until my quicker ears detected it as being produced by the clashing

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of cymbals; and I immediately surmised that it proceeded from the black boy, who, probably, had been sent forth by Kate, to let us know it was time to return to the house. The young rascal soon emerged from the bushes near us, and gave us to understand that "Uncle George," the old lady, Kate, and the Captain, who had arrived in our absence, had become alarmed about us, and had despatched him in search of us.

"But who told you," I asked, "to take your cymbals with you?"

"Miss Kate, to be sure," he answered; "she said the 'turtle-doves' would hear it when no other sound would reach them."

"What did she mean, little black boy, by the 'turtle-doves,' do you think?"

"I dunno, I 'se sure," he replied, "'spec, tho', she allude to the Cap'n and herself. Them two 's gone off in 'nother d'rection, lookin' for you."

"I expect you are correct in your surmise, little black boy," I said; "so suppose you go after them with your cymbals." And I gave him a gold dollar in consideration of the occasion. The child of ebony went in pursuit of the pair, while Alice and I walked slowly homeward.

We arrived at the house long before the Captain and Kate appeared. "Uncle George" was watching for us from the piazza, as we entered the garden, and exclaimed, the moment he saw us, "The moon, though a new one, was late in going down, my boy, I fear, but" — here he caught a glimpse of Alice's blushing cheeks, and ceasing his raillery, added, as if continuing his original sentence, "but I wish you both joy with my whole heart, for all that." He kissed Alice, and shook me warmly by the hand.

The old lady, seated before the fire, was busy with her knitting when we entered, which she laid aside, however, on seeing us, and rising, went to Alice and pressed her to her bosom.

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Alice's face was such a tell-tale, it could not keep the secret. It shone forth in her eyes, it was printed on her lips, and lurked in the dimples of her cheeks.

Soon the Captain and Kate came in. If any thing, Kate's face was more of a tell-tale than Alice's. There was no doubt but Kate herself had that very evening been wooed and won. More than that, upon Kate's hand, on what is known as the "engagement finger," shone a diamond ring, which was not there when Alice last left her. This was, of course, told to me afterward by Alice; but even I observed the ring, and envied the Captain that he had, with forethought, provided himself with one in anticipation of the happy moment when he could use it.

On this night, to all intent and purpose, "my summer in the country" may be said to have come to a close. There were no more hearts to win, and no more new moons could go down upon love unuttered. Still the summer is not yet quite ended. The harvest is ripe, the hand of the reaper is on it, but it is not yet gathered into the barn. A storm may arise that will sweep away the wealth of the husbandman at the very moment when his heart, full of boastings, cries aloud, "It is mine!" The new wine with which his presses are running over, may in a night be turned to vinegar. The sweets of love may be changed to the galls of bitterness. Pleasure cometh with the night, but sorrow followeth the morning.

These thoughts, and such as these, kept me awake after I had retired to my bed. I tried to drive them away, but they would not go. I reasoned with myself, and called it folly; but the more I reasoned, the more fallacious seemed my reasoning, while my fears assumed a greater reality. The Captain, who occupied the room opening out of mine, did not seem to be troubled with such fancies as filled my brain, but apparently slept as soundly and as easily as if the little affair which he had just consummated, was an event of every evening's occurrence. "Heaven only

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knows how it will end," I exclaimed, as for the hundred and fiftieth time I turned my pillow to get a cool side for my aching head. But the daylight came before I fell asleep, and when I arose, the family, with the exception of Alice, who came down shortly after me, had breakfasted, and the Captain had been gone an hour.

"Such a parting as took place between the Captain and Kate," said 'Uncle George,' "was, I tell you my boy, worth seeing."

"Now, 'Uncle George,'" exclaimed Kate, "you are too bad." And Kate swept majestically out of the room.

"I spoke thus to her purposely, my boy," said the old man, turning to me, "for I knew that if she remained in the room, Alice, dear girl, would n't be able to eat a mouthful, as Kate would have teased her so."

And I think "Uncle George" was correct, as she scarcely eat any thing, though my eye only was upon her.

Henceforth the twenty-second of August will be a memorable day to me, nor will I longer doubt that the orange-blossom which I won on the evening of that day, will bloom into perfectness on any other bosom than mine.

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CHAPTER XXV.

THE STORY FINISHED.

"TO-DAY," I say, as I seat myself in the orchard, with my twelve days' audience gathered around me, "sees the end of my vacation, and the conclusion of my story. The episodal feast of the 'Cakes and Ale' of my youthful days will have been partaken, and only the memory of it will remain."

A silence, as of regret that the finale was no near, reigned in the circle.

My summer in the country is at an end. Just as I begin to get accustomed to country life, I wake up and find that the autumn has come; that it is time for me to go back to the city; that the moonlight nights wherein I walked the woodland paths with Alice, have fled forever, and henceforth my walks with her must be confined to the dusty streets of the city and the shady walks of St. John's Park. But not even such as these can be mine, for at least another month to come, for Alice and Kate are both to remain here in the mountains, while I, with to-morrow's dawn, depart for the city.

These three months in the country, however, have not been without an important result to me. I have broken the links that held me to the dead love of long ago; and, forging new ones, have bound myself to the living Alice, who has promised to be my wife; but autumn, winter, and spring must elapse, so she says, before I can make her my bride. When June comes, tripping upon violets, and

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wreathed with roses, Alice will wear orange flowers in her hair, and let me place on her finger the plain gold ring of marriage. Never before, to me, has the month of June seemed so distant. Oh! the days that lie between now and then! Are there any red-lettered days among them? Will I find any golden minutes, any silvered hours, in this long space of time? Or will the days be leaden, the skies overcast, and the months of my pilgrimage shrouded in black? Such fancies as these intrude themselves upon me, in spite of myself. Alice laughs at me, and says June will be here all too quickly. Her happiest days, she cries, laughingly, are drawing to a close. She wonders if wedded life will prove half so sweet as these months of betrothal will be. She thinks it would be well to extend the period of engagement to still another June, and then another after that. It is so pleasant, she says, to have one who will come at her call, and do her bidding; one whom she can depend on to accompany her to church, to concerts and parties; who will not refuse to untangle skeins of silk for her; who will bring her new books, and read them aloud to her; who will insist, in winter, when she goes out, on her wrapping her velvets and furs about her; and will, for her sake, take delight in carrying her umbrella and overshoes. And these little attentions, with others of a like nature, will, she thinks, make the coming months a season of pleasure.

As for me, I think, although courtship time is well enough, it will not compare with the joys incident to marriage. Indeed, there can be no joys equal to home joys. You may be as gay as the gayest, and attend all manner of pleasure-yielding places, but your truest enjoyment will be obtained at home. Your home may be small, and not richly furnished, but if it be a home, in the full acceptation of the term, it will be comfortable and cosy. Your wife — for no one can have a home without one — will be just the nicest woman in the world, and always studying your comfort. This delightful trait of hers is, doubtless, intended

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by Providence to compensate you for the deeds of kindness you were wont to offer her in the days of your courtship. The tables seem to be slightly turned. You do not carry her rubbers any longer in your overcoat pocket, when you go out with her on evenings which threaten rain, but you advise her to wear them. She, on her part, now provides your slippers for you against your coming home: you find them beside your easy-chair, over which your dressing-gown is thrown, and the chair itself, if it be winter, drawn up before the fire, or in summer-time, placed beside the open window. She kisses you when you enter the house. She notices at once if you be wearied, and, though she may not express this knowledge in words, she will show it in some little attention, which, if you be not unfeeling, will touch your heart-strings, and, perchance, bring the tears to your eyes.

With such ideas as these filling my mind, I wrote the following lines, a short time before I won my Alice: —

Long I waited, dreaming, hoping, as through life I pressed alone,
For the touch of one that loved me, for the music of one tone;
Many years the vision hovered on the borders of my way,
Visited my couch at evening — stood before me through the day;
Once I thought I clasped it closely, drew it yielding to my side,
But, alas! it vanished from me, and became Death's beauteous bride.

Then my heart grew cold and careless — years of silence interpose;
Love put by his pointed arrows, broke his bow and sought repose.
Not a glance from sunny maiden found its way into my heart,
Not a hand with gentle pressure caused my hidden tears to start;
Cold and calm, as water flowing through a channel cut in stone,
Passed I down life's rocky valley, selfish, reckless, and alone.

Not till, Alice, I had seen thee, did my better self return —
Not till I had heard thy laughter, did the torch of love reburn —
Not till I had come to know thee, learned each goodness and each grace,
Did I think again to venture to admire a human face;
But my stubborn heart is melted, and I bow before thy throne,
Till I fain would whisper, Alice, "now indeed I 'm not alone!"

But a shadow falls before me, and I tread a barren strand,
When I fear my name is written on thy heart as if on sand,

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Which the coming morn may scatter, as the waves upon the beach
Sweep into the boundless ocean all things frail within their reach;
Then would my poor heart at random drift o'er life's tempestuous main,
As of yore, it sadly drifted, full of longings and of pain.

Alice thinks these verses equal to any which Ticknor and Fields have embalmed in their blue and gold volumes of the poets. Of course I knew their weak points, but, as the knowledge of them could not possibly gratify Alice, I wisely held my peace concerning them.

The night is fast wearing away. A few hours more and I shall leave Alice behind me, and return alone to the crowded city. The wind sighing through the pines, near my chamber-window, makes sad music; and I am almost inclined to remain where I am, and not desert my summer-house in the country. But I should be laughed at if I do not go, and, besides, as Alice says, a month will not last an eternity, and when October comes she will also be a denizen of the city. "Uncle George" is loth to have me go, but the old lady says it is all for the best; while Kate declares she is glad of it, for I have destroyed the nice walks which she and Alice used to have before I made my appearance, and she longs for the time to come when they will be renewed.

It is decided, I believe, that the Captain and Kate will be married during the Christmas holidays. The ceremony will take place in the city, and "Uncle George" and the old lady, his wife, have promised to be present. John, the son of his mother, will, doubtless, be disconsolate when he hears of this coming marriage. The young Virginian, whose touching lines to Kate had something to do, I think, with influencing the Captain to make his expected, but long delayed, proposal, writes to me, from Saratoga, of a fresh conquest he has made, in the person of a "young, beautiful, and wealthy widow, who has a noble plantation in South Carolina." The two maiden ladies, who played

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the "old soldiers" on the Fourth, are still living as becomes maiden ladies of their age, and enjoying the goods the gods grant them. The little black boy has become the possessor of a fiddle, and has laid aside, for the present at least, his cymbals, to devote his leisure hours to the practice of his new instrument, which he daily pursues in a persevering and energetic manner inside the barn.

"But after all," said Jeannie, "you did not marry Alice."

"No," I answered, "Alice was only a might-have-been. The fact is, I thought that by waiting a year or two longer, I could obtain some one nearer perfection than even Alice was, for my wife, and — though it was a difficult thing to accomplish, yet you see, as you look at that blessed woman there in the window, that I was successful."

"Nonsense," exclaimed my wife. "The truth is, Jeannie, that he never made love to an Alice, and never was engaged to any one until he met me."

"And this episode, as he calls it, in his life, which we have been listening to" —

"Never happened," said my wife, interrupting, "and is a pure invention."

Frank looked at me, and winked knowingly

But for my part, I said never a word.

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CHAPTER XXVI.

ALL ABOUT A NEW BONNET.

I BROUGHT a new bonnet home to my wife. Now, nothing can be better than a new bonnet, to bring home to a wife. It is "cakes and ale" to her of the most agreeable kind. A new bonnet in a house is an unfailing source of delight for, at least, one Sunday. After it has been to church, and your wife's female friends, and, perhaps, others who are not her friends, have admired and cast envious glances at it, it ceases, to some extent, to possess its pristine charm. Still, with a little management on the part of the wearer, a new bonnet, if it be a very elegant one, may be made to do good service, not only at church, but at the opera, one or two concerts, and a lecture. I don't know why it is, but, so far as my experience goes, I think ladies take very kindly to new bonnets; they seem to appreciate them much more than any other portion of their wardrobe. Perhaps it is because it can be shown to greater advantage than many other articles. In crowded assemblages the bonnet can always be seen. The furs, the shawl, the rich dresses, and the jewelry are ofttimes hidden from observation; but the bonnet rises above all, and, in church, can be seen for pews around.

It is very gratifying to the husband to mark the smile which lights up his wife's countenance when he informs her that he has brought her a new bonnet. That smile, in my opinion, is worth more than many new bonnets. It reminds me, somehow, of my courtship days, and I wish,

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at such moments, that I could be always bringing home new bonnets to my wife.

I know of no other article of ladies' apparel which is so subject to the changes of fashion as the bonnet. Every month witnesses an alteration; so that you may safely take a new bonnet home to your wife each month, without fearing that she already possesses one in the least like it.

For a man whose experience in the matrimonial arena is of an infelicitous character, I can imagine no surer way of his making it felicitous than by a monthly gift to his wife of a new bonnet. Even though, in the parlance of the world, he can't afford it, yet he should do it for the sake of domestic peace. Wisely hath a latter-day Solomon said: "Better is a new bonnet on the head of a wife, than shoes and stockings on the feet of children."

In my case, fortunately for my purse and the comfort of my little ones, this necessity does not exist. The new bonnet which, two or three times a year, I take home to my wife, is not given as a peace-offering. I sometimes think, too, that I enjoy that new bonnet quite as much as she does. I experience great pleasure in seeing her open the square green box containing it, on which the name of a French milliner of repute, in gilt letters on a white enamelled card, appears, and observe her look of approval — she regards my taste, in the matter of selecting a bonnet, as unequalled — when her glance first falls upon it. Then, placing her hand carefully under it, she lifts it as tenderly out of the box as if it were an infant, and gazes at it with admiration. She takes, before speaking a word, a front, side, and back view of it, turning it quietly around on her hand, and sometimes, I have remarked, like a *connoisseur* before a picture, with half-closed eyes and head resting a little on one side, reminding me of the action of a canary-bird, so as to get a fairer view of it, and to better appreciate its *contour* and style. Then she daintily rearranges a bud or a leaf on the outside, putting the bud over the leaf

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or the leaf under the bud, as it may be. She gives a little twist, too, to a cluster of flowers which seemed inharmoniously put together, and I confess that, even to my eyes, it assumes a more artistic appearance. Then she shakes up, in a light, airy way, the plume, but immediately thereafter proceeds to smooth it down; she ruffles and smooths it several times, indeed, before she has it to please her. Then she closely scrutinizes the quality of the velvet, the texture of the ribbons, and the character of the lace. Then, speaking for the first time, and in somewhat of a confidential tone, she remarks that the lace is real thread lace, Chantilly or Valenciennes, or whatever it may be. By this time she is prepared to perform the great act of trying it on.

Getting before the mirror, where she can obtain a fair view of herself, the dear woman proceeds to smooth down her hair, where it lies plain on her head; or elevate the curls a trifle, if there be curls; or lift up the puffs a little, where there are puffs. Then, after assuring herself, by repeated glances at the mirror, that her hair is in good order, she places, with due solemnity, the bonnet on her head. It takes about ten minutes to get that bonnet into the exact position which she deems the most becoming, and to tie the strings in a suitable manner under her chin. Then she turns to you, with a most ravishing smile, and, arching her eyebrows and making her lips look like a half-blown rose, gives you a glance which plainly asks you to express your opinion as to the bonnet and the wearer.

It is always safe, on these occasions, to say that you never saw a lovelier bonnet; one more becoming, or — and here you can make a low bow — a moment when the wearer looked younger and fairer than she does now. But you must not seek to kiss her, for she would instantly frown down any such attempt on your part. Wait until the bonnet is taken off and laid into its box before you do

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this, and then — well, then it is a good thing to do; and that day, if you stay at home, will be a white day in your life.

Within one week, my wife's new bonnet attended a concert, a lecture, and a wedding in church; a course of treatment most satisfactory to the wearer.

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CHAPTER XXVII.

BONNEY COMES HOME.

BONNEY has come home. Bonney is the name of the monkey which my good old friend, Captain Coffin, of the *Fleetwing*, brought with him from India, when he returned from there about a year ago, as a present to my little ones. The monkey, however, proved to be a heathen, and did n't know how to behave himself; so I was obliged to send him away to be educated in a Christian-like manner. The slight education he had received on board ship, on his voyage to this country, was not of an improving character, and was, if any thing, somewhat worse than his original wild and heathenish condition. He was guilty of a great many naughty acts. Mischief, like a mantle, covered him from head to foot. He was an iconoclast of the most zealous character. He was a robber of the most enterprising kind, and a murderer of the most malignant type. The rapidity with which he would destroy images — such as Roger's *statuettes* — would put to shame those iconoclastic fellows of the eighth century, who went about doing this kind of business. Then, too, in getting into and going through a larder, he was more skillful than the skillfulest of burglars; locks, bars, and bolts were of no account to him, and, when it came to killing cats and domestic fowls, he was the most bloodthirsty of executioners. He could strangle a cat quicker than the Thugs of his native land could their victims. Perhaps he had learned to do this through them. He was very skillful, too, in taking off the heads of my favorite fowls, and noth-

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ing delighted him so much as to seize a rooster engaged in the act of crowing, and, wringing off his head, nip in the bud, as it were, his clarion note. For these deeds, and others of a like character, it was deemed necessary to send Bonney away to be educated, as unruly boys are sometimes sent to sea, to improve them in their behavior. So I sent Bonney on his travels with an itinerant organ grinder, who agreed, for a consideration, to make a good and accomplished monkey of him.

This organ grinder was, himself, an imported person, and came, as L. E. L. says, from —

"That land
Where the poet's pen and the painter's hand are most divine."

In simple prose, he was an Italian, and, when he first came to this country, was engaged in the fine-art line of business, and made and sold plaster casts of Garibaldi, and other distinguished foreign, as well as American, celebrities. The public were not educated, however, quite up to his standard in art, and their failing to appreciate his works, was the cause of his failing in business. He was, therefore, forced to go into the music line, and took kindly to an organ and a monkey. I was assured by him that he made "very much money" at his present business, and would, some days, take in as much as five dollars.

He was a good hand with monkeys, and fully understood them. I think, though, he was obliged to adopt Solomon's method with children, and not spare the rod. He used, also, to coax them with tid-bits, and he told me it was a very pleasant thing to watch my monkey, sitting quietly all day long, eating cream-cakes, and picking out the plums, like any Jack Horner.

When I stated this to my wife, she smiled, and said that she had never heard of plums in cream cakes.

"Be that as it may," I replied, "the organ man told me so, and I presume he knew of what he was speaking."

When, as I occasionally did, I used to encounter my

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monkey, accompanied by the Italian and his organ, going to and fro in the streets of New York city, I always stopped to speak to him, and dropped a nickel into his upheld cap. It was quite affecting to look at him, clad in his blue jacket and red trousers, and with his restless eyes turning hither and thither, toward the crowd, in search of the outstretched hand with a cent in it. He always recognized me, and looked piteously into my face, as much as to say, that he wished school were out.

Once he ran away from his preceptor, and was gone two days. Some boys discovered him, high up on a tree, in Washington Square, and induced him to come down by the sight of a few boiled chestnuts. He soon escaped from them, however, and the next heard of him was, that a policeman had taken him to a station house, and telegraphed all over town, that he had found a stray child, intellectual in appearance, but who could give no account of himself. That evening, all the mothers who had lost children during the day, rushed to the station-house, in the hope that he might be their wandering darling — but he was not. The disconsolate Italian finally recovered him, and gave him, I believe, after he got home, some cream pies.

"Why not cakes and ale?" asked my wife.

I shook my head and declined to answer.

What with travel and the education, musical and otherwise, which he had received, that monkey came back to Woodbine Cottage much improved.

"He is as gentlemanly and polite," I said to Jeannie, "as a conductor."

"A lightning conductor?" Jeannie asked.

"The conductor of a lightning train," I answered.

"Oh!" she exclaimed.

"Now, nothing can be better in a house," I said, "than a monkey, except"—

"Except," interrupted my wife, "no monkey. I never

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have forgiven, and I never will forgive the captain, for bringing that monkey to Woodbine Cottage. He is a perfect nuisance, and I wish we were well rid of him."

"But, observe, my dear," I said, "how greatly improved he is. He no longer strangles the cats."

"I wish he would, though," interrupted my wife, "for those six blind kittens in the garret are really more than we require."

"I was speaking of cats, not kittens," I said; "and then he seems to take really a pleasure in listening to the roosters' crow, and don't even offer to molest them. And what, pray, has he pilfered since he came back? Why, not a thing. He takes his meals regularly in his little house, and, though he don't decline an apple or a handful of nuts between meals, yet you may leave dishes of them standing on the table and he won't even look at them. I really don't think that there ever was a better behaved monkey. Besides, just think of what a source of amusement he is to the children. I don't see how they could get on without him."

"Why," said my wife, "they got along well enough without him before he came, and after he went, and I do not understand why they could not do equally as well again without him. The truth is, my dear, that I have no liking for a monkey, and I cannot see why we should be troubled with one. Besides, none of our neighbors have monkeys."

"But that is no reason," I replied, "why we should not have one, if we want one. Our eldest is taking a good deal of pains with that monkey, and is teaching him to ride on the goat. Bonney is also very much attached to our boy, and the other day he followed him to school, and, unperceived, walked into the school-room and seated himself at the adjoining desk, opening the book that lay there, just as our boy did. Of course, when he was discovered, he was put out; but he waited in the trees near by, gravely

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poring over the book he had found on the desk, until our little boy appeared, when he walked sedately home beside him, carrying his book under his arm. It was the old story of the pet lamb over again. You remember the verses, commencing with, 'Mary had a little lamb.'"

Miss Em. said she did, and repeated them.

"The first day or two," said Jeannie, "after Bonney came home, he was a little mopish, and kept himself curled up in his little house, for all the world as if he were home-sick. But when I opened the piano, and began to play a popular air, he came forth from his retreat, and began dancing and capering about in great glee, holding out his little cap for pennies and turning marvellous somersaults over the chairs. He is very importunate now for me to play for him every morning. "Dixie's Land" is his favorite piece; and is quite indignant if I do not occasionally put a button in his upheld cap."

"Oh, Jeannie," I cried, "I fear you are romancing now."

"No," she said; "it is really true," and she appealed to my wife to confirm it. Which my wife did.

"But," said my wife, "I don't want that monkey here. I believe he is sly and treacherous, and I hope you'll get rid of him. Don't you think that Barnum would take him into his Happy Family to board."

"Well, I don't know," I replied; "but I will make inquiries."

And thus the matter rests. Bonney makes great sport for the little ones, and behaves himself better than some little boys and girls of whom I know; but I fear that, notwithstanding all this, there will be such a pressure brought to bear against him that, like some of our generals in the war, he will have to evacuate his position and retire, in good order, to some less pregnable position — bringing up perhaps, at Barnum's Museum or the Sandwich Islands.

Bonney is fast asleep in his little tin house, and don't know what I am writing about him. Poor little Bonney.

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

AUNT SALLY.

NOTHING can be better," I said to my wife, as we gathered about the tea urn, at which Jeannie presided, with a very matronly air, "than an Aunt Jeannie — except," and here I bethought myself, "an Aunt Sally."

"I don't acknowledge that exception," said my wife.

"Nor I either," said pert Miss Em.

"Nor I either," said each of the little ones.

Jeannie herself only smiled, and asked me if I would have a little more sugar in my tea. I said I would, and passed my cup over to her.

Now Jeannie is a very nice little body to have in one's house, and knows, I imagine, as much as most young girls of her age — she is only eighteen — ought to know. She is of a quiet, thoughtful temperament, though at times she can be as merry as a cricket. She reminds me of a snowdrop, delicate in appearance, but possessing a good deal of hardiness in its nature, and able to endure more chilling blasts than one would deem it capable of. She is a blonde, with blue eyes, and hair which is just the least inclined to be auburn, and which she wears short, hanging in ringlets around her head. I think she is ambitious, however, to have a waterfall; but, having heard me declare that I thought she looked better than if she wore one, she defers to my opinion in the matter. She is very neat in her attire, and wears the prettiest of morning gowns at breakfast, and the trimmest of travelling costumes, and the

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most bewitching — I think bewitching is the word — of little hats, when she goes to town with me, of bright, sunshiny mornings, in the cars. And, as for her silken robes — those apparellings which she puts on in the evening, when she wears her pearls, and goes with Frank to the opera — they are marvels of the weaver's skill and the dressmaker's art.

I like Jeannie's appearance best though, when she wears a soft, gray dress, and glides about the house quietly as a sunbeam, attending to little household duties, or when seated in the library, with a bit of cambric ruffling in her hands, she pretends to be working industriously, and all the time keeps singing a plaintive song to herself, while I am writing, as I now am, near by.

Jeannie is a great favorite with the children, and I am afraid that she humors them a little too much. It is she who keeps them in "cakes and ale" from Christmas to Christmas, and is never tired of buying dolls, and trumpets, and oranges, and candies for them. They go to her with their troubles and grievances, their scratched fingers and torn dresses, their hard lessons and broken toys, and she makes every thing right. I don't know what their mother will do when Jeannie gets married; and when, therefore, I put into my remark the clause about Aunt Sally, I was not surprised at my wife's taking exceptions thereto.

"Oh," I said, in answer, "Jeannie does very well. She understands all about getting my slippers for me, and seeing to my toast and tea, and mending my gloves, and singing me to sleep after dinner, and such kind of light work; but when you come to heavier household duties, give me my Aunt Sally."

"Selfish man!" exclaimed my wife. "But who is your Aunt Sally? Why has she never been to see you?"

"Oh, my dear, my dear," I replied, "she has been dead and buried this many a year, or you may be certain she would, ere this, have found her way to my house. She al-

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ways used to come to my mother's house at the right moment and always stayed just long enough — say three or four days. She had a regular circuit to travel, and though she had a home of her own, she was seldom to be found there. Still, there were periods when she did not stir abroad for a week at a time, and would receive no visitors; but these occasions were, I always used to think, the anniversaries of a sister's or a brother's death. She may, too, have taken the opportunity, which these retirements from public life, as it were, afforded her, to mend her stockings and repair her garments generally. Indeed, the improvement in her wardrobe, on her reappearance, was marked, and, though she could never be said to be gorgeously attired — for she always dressed in black bombazine, and looked for all the world as if she had just become a widow, which was not so, though, for she was ever (at least as long as I could remember) that blessed thing, an old maid — yet she was always dressed neatly, and wore a becoming lace cap. She was, it is true, slightly addicted to the use of snuff; but it was an expensive habit which she did not follow up very closely."

"It was a very pleasant sight," I said, "to behold my Aunt Sally, early of a Sunday morning, before the church bells were rung, seated, spectacled, and clad in her newest bombazine, engaged in poring over the Bible opened on her lap. She was a great reader of that book, and, next to it, I think, her hymn-book was oftenest in her hand. Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress,' Baxter's 'Saint's Rest,' and a volume by the Rev. Legh Richmond — I have forgotten the title of it — formed about the substance of her library. The 'New York Observer' and the 'Missionary Herald' were her favorite newspapers, and she always carried in her basket a bundle of tracts — which she distributed, however, only at opportune moments, to such persons as she thought stood in need of religious instruction. I have quite a collection of those tracts, in some one of my boxes

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in the attic, with her autograph on the covers, and I think I will hunt them up some day for you, Jeannie."

Jeannie said she would like dearly to have them.

"She used to be troubled, I remember," I continued, "with cold feet, and many a time has she hired, with a piece of cake, little boys — myself among the number — to carry, in the winter time, for her to the church, a foot-stove, filled with live coals. Once a very naughty boy — I will not mention his name — was mischievous enough to put a little cayenne pepper on the coals, as he deposited the foot-stove in the pew where she sat. It made every body, seated near Aunt Sally, sneeze; and she, dear old soul, sneezed more than any of them. She never asked that naughty boy to carry her foot-stove again, and he lost, to my certain knowledge, a good many slices of cake thereby."

"One would think," said my wife, "that you were that naughty boy."

"My dear," I replied, "look at me: do I bear any resemblance, with my bald head" — "only partly bald," said Jeannie — "and my gray beard, to a boy who would do such an act?"

My wife said she thought not; "but still"—

"Still," I exclaimed, "if it were so, I doubtless repented of it in sackcloth and ashes, and it would not be the charitable thing to charge me again with it. The knowledge, too, that their papa had done this would not be a wise thing for the children to know."

"That is so," said Jeannie.

"Jeannie," I said, after a pause, "another cup of tea, if you please, but not quite so sweet as the last. And, by-the-by, Jeannie, I hope you never will take to snuffing, even if you should live to be an old maid — it is not a pleasant practice."

Jeannie promised me that she never would, and then wanted me to tell her something more about my Aunt Sally.

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"Well," I replied, "there is very little more to say about her. She was a good old soul, and when I used to plague her, as I sometimes did, by singing under her window, while she was at my mother's, a song of which the chorus ran thus: —

'Sally, Sally, my old Aunt Sally,
Re-ri, ro-ri, round the corner, Sally,'

she would only say that boys always had the hog-age when they were about fifteen or sixteen, and that I had it as bad as any boy she 'd ever seen. She prophesied, too, that I would be a minister before I died."

My wife said, she wished it might come true.

"I always thought," I replied, "until recently, that she meant a parson; but since I took to assisting Uncle Sam in the Government, I believe she meant that I would be a Minister Plenipotentiary — I think that is the name given to those fellows who get an outfit — whatever that is, but it must be a pretty good fit, for they all seem to like it — and go abroad to a foreign country."

"Oh!" exclaimed my wife.

And Jeannie asked, "Why not?"

"To be sure," I said, "why not?"

"Well," I continued, "my old aunt prophesied it, and she was very clever on prophecies, which she used to read out of a tea-cup, from the grounds lying therein. Fortune-telling, I believe, though, she called it. And that reminds me that she was very partial to tea — young hyson, I believe, was her favorite. To go to a regular old-fashioned tea-drinking was one of the comforts of her life, and next to that she enjoyed a prayer-meeting. Although a Presbyterian, she was always quite cheerful, and possessed a nature full of charity toward all mankind."

"Dear old lady," said my wife, tenderly.

"I said," I continued, "that she was partial to tea-drinkings and prayer-meetings. She also was much attached to quilting-parties, weddings, and all kinds of merry-makings.

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Without her presence, too, on the occasion, some mothers would n't have ventured to add to their households."

"Jeannie, Jeannie," interrupted my wife, "I think I heard the door-bell ring."

"No, you don't," I replied, "be quiet."

My wife shook her head reprovingly at me.

"But, before all things," I said, "I think she most enjoyed a funeral. It was a combination of a birthday-party — the birth of a soul from earth to heaven — and a prayer-meeting. Then, too, she always had her cup of hot tea in the mourner's room, after the procession had moved. The excitement of borrowing chairs from the neighbors, on these sad occasions — which duty she always assumed — and returning them, was a little more, perhaps, than she ought to have undergone, for she was generally fidgety a whole week thereafter, and indulged more than usual in snuff and the use of her handkerchief. It must have been a great relief, though, to her, when the last borrowed chair was carried home, and she could sit down quietly over her cup of tea, and musingly recall to her mind all the good qualities which the deceased had possessed during life.

"Oh, Aunt Sally was a good old soul, and was great on doughnuts and ginger-snaps, apple-dumplings and plum-puddings, mince and pumpkin pies, and roasted pig and turkeys. She was high authority in the matter of stuffing for a goose, and knew more than my grandmother about patching trousers. I don't think she took kindly to the elbows of jackets; but to the knees and seat of a little boy's trousers she seemed to have an almost maternal affection. I believe she liked boys better than she did girls, for, occasionally, in the winter, she would give a candy frolic, and invite all the good boys — and sometimes bad boys slipped in — of the neighborhood to it; but I never heard of her making a girl's party.

"She was somewhat inclined to be fleshy; but fat, in old ladies, can be forgiven, and I think it makes them more

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than ever good-natured. I never knew of an old lady, who was fat, being cross. She always carried with her, when she made her visits, a deep willow basket, with a handle in the centre, and a cover on each side of it. This basket contained some of her great specifics: Cousin Hannah Barnard's salve for burns; Dr. Frary's railroad pills for almost every bodily ill, and a vial containing the juice of milkweed for warts — the hands of many of the little boys whom she knew being troubled in this way. About Christmas time she was every body's aunt, and always saw that the children's stockings were darned and washed, so as to be hung up in readiness for Santa Claus. She had little to give herself, though, as presents, save perhaps a pincushion of her own make, or a pair of mittens or stockings of her knitting; but she always had a good deal of love to give, and much excellent advice. As Jeannie reminds me of a snow-drop, so Aunt Sally always made me think of a peony — she was just so full and florid, and made a good show wherever she went. I do not think, although Aunt Sally was partial to cakes, that she possessed a taste for ale; but I can forgive her this, since she had so many other good traits: she was charitable to the extent of her means; she was of a forgiving disposition, and never harbored an ill thought of any one. She was indulgent and kind to all the boys and girls who called her Aunt Sally, and she lived and died at peace with all mankind.

"Jeannie, my cup is out, the Story of Aunt Sally is finished, and if my wife has no objections, we will all adjourn to the library."

My wife having no objections, we adjourned.

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CHAPTER XXIX.

PICNICKING.

"MY dear," I said, the other morning at breakfast, to the estimable woman who takes an interest in my income, and regards my shortcomings with leniency, "it would be a capital idea to pass the day with our little ones in the woods."

"It would so," she replied.

"We might ask," I added, "the O'Monoghans, of O'Monoghan Castle, to join us with their flock."

"We might so," my wife said.

"We could also invite the Scotch gentleman over the track to go with us," I continued.

"We could so," she answered.

"Then, we might, could, would, and should have a picnic," I added.

"Certainly," my wife replied.

"It is a pity, though," I said, "that Jeannie is in the city, for she would so enjoy it. Perhaps we had better send for her."

"Oh, no," my wife answered. "Jeannie is enjoying herself very well in town, and, as you know, is engaged in purchasing her wedding *trousseau*. Besides, we can have another one when she comes home."

"So we can," I replied.

Thus the affair was settled.

It don't take long to get up a picnic party in the country. All one has to do is to start one's eldest boy out among the neighbors, to notify them thereof, and the thing

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is done. They come forward immediately, fully armed and rationed, and march into the woods like an army with banners, blowing brazen trumpets. It is a good plan, though, to send out in advance a couple of sharp-shooters to bring down a little game, and make a fire. On this occasion the O'Monoghan himself and the Scotch gentleman preceded our party, and, when we arrived on the ground, were engaged in building a fire large enough to roast the wild buffalo which they had promised to shoot, if encountered; but which had wisely kept out of reach of their rifles. They had, however, brought down a pair of tame chickens, that had fortunately wandered into the woods, and bagged a half-dozen small birds. These, added to the provisions with which our larder was already stored, made a bill of fare fit for kings, queens, and princes.

The spot selected for our picnic was one which has been celebrated both by poet's pen and painter's hand, and which my Savage literary friend has effectively described in two lines, as

> "The leafy, mossy, rocky banks of Bronx,
> Where elfin goblins blow their conchy-conchs."

Here, with the river flowing within a stone's throw, under the shade of forest-trees, we erected our temporary Lares and Penates. The solitary Scotch gentleman from over the border, the O'Monoghans from the castle, and the Grays from the cottage, all busied themselves in picnickian labors. Some gathered wood for the fire, others engaged in cooking the food, and still others arranged the feast.

"Ah, these days in the woods, my dear," I said to my wife, "may very properly be regarded as the best of cakes and ale. Let us eat, drink, and be thankful."

It was a glorious October day, and the air was balmy, the sky clear, and the crickets sung their autumnal songs. The trees were robed in their brightest apparel. The maples in scarlet, the elms in gold, the oaks in russet, the dog-wood in purple, and the Virginia creepers, winding

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their lithesome way to the topmost boughs of the still green willows, in fiery red. The sumachs held their crimson cones aloft, the purple poke-berries drooped upon their stems, the elder-berries were dried and nearly gone, and a few bunches only of the frost-grape could be seen among withering leaves. Here and there, under the trees, the little folks found a few chestnuts and hickory nuts, but the boys and the squirrels had been there before them, each gathering their winter's store. But many wild flowers remained in bloom; the golden-rod was the most prominent, however, though purple and crimson ones were to be found. The robins sung and the squirrels chattered overhead as we drew around the table-cloth spread on the grass, and covered with tempting viands.

This eating in the woods is a capital idea, and, as the learned O'Monoghan said, "one gets a good appetite by inhaling plenty of oxygen." If bolting a dozen hard-boiled eggs is any proof of a man's possessing such an appetite, the Scotch gentleman from over the border had it. The way the eggs disappeared before that individual, was discouraging to the hens in my poultry-yard; since they could never expect to keep pace with his requirements. I must say, too, that the way the oysters, fresh from the Sound, and roasted in the shell, were disposed of by the O'Monoghan, spoke well for his ability in the way of eating, nor did the feminine portion of the party do injustice to the chickens and game. As for the children, who, on all occasions, stuff themselves as full as they can hold, I must say that the present time was no exception to the rule. I, however, being an invalid, could only partake sparingly of the wing of a robin. To my taste a robin is a very nice little bird. I have had a great affection for robins ever since I read of their charming treatment to the babes in the wood. I was very sorry to learn that our sharp-shooters had shot these innocent birds, for they are essentially the bird of the homestead, and should be cared for and guarded from

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harm. After the cruel archer has shot them, however, — when they have breathed their little song away, and smoothed their rumpled feathers for the last time, — I think it is not inconsistent with my regard for them to give them, as far as I possibly can, a quiet resting place.

"Poor little robin red-breast," I said, softly, as I tenderly separated sweet morsels from its wing, "you led a pleasant, roving life through the summer time, pilfering ripe cherries whenever you had a chance, and filling your crop with all manner of dainty seeds and crumbs. You have had the joys of life, and henceforth, if you had lived. its bitterness would have been yours. Such food only during the autumnal and winter months, as the berries of the sumach and the cedar trees you would have found, and chill winds, cold rains, and icy snows would have been your portion. It is better, little robin, as it is. Peace to your bones."

I might have said something more, but at this point I was interrupted by an exclamation of a semi-profane character, from the O'Monoghan, who, as I had for some time observed, had been actively engaged in driving away from the vicinity of his head, with his napkin, what I supposed were musquitoes, but which he asserted were hornets. Now, for hornets I have no liking or compassion, as I have for robin red-breast, or even as I might possibly have for bees, which make honey. So, as I get nothing from them, either in the matter of song or honey, I was not distressed when the O'Monoghan assured me, with a tear in his eye, that he had just killed one, and he believed it to be the rascal that had stung him.

I was trying to account for the reason why the hornets, which appeared to be pretty thick around the O'Monoghan's head, should confine their attention solely to him, and had about concluded that it was owing to some highly scented oil which he might have on his hair, that attracted them, when, simultaneously, the O'Monoghan, the O'Mon-

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oghaness and myself, sprung to our feet, each with a dozen hornets or less attacking and stinging us. There was a slight stampede from the vicinity of that table-cloth, and when, a few moments thereafter, not being pursued by the yellow-jacketed rascals, we cautiously returned, and examined into the matter, we discovered that the O'Monoghan had been sitting over a hornet's nest in the earth, and that they, therefore, not approving of being debarred entrance to their home, had thereupon planned an attack, and gained a victory.

A little revenge, though, for the pain they had inflicted on us, we felt, notwithstanding that they had the right on their side, would be sweet. So a mine was dug, and filled with gunpowder, which was duly exploded, and several hundred hornets were blown in fragments into the air.

After this peace reigned in our camp. The October sun cast long shadows across the waters of the Bronx, the katydids began to sing, the crickets to chirp, and the dew of evening to fall, as, happy and weary, we gathered up the remains of our feast, and went gleefully homeward, well pleased with our day in the woods.

When Jeannie came home, two or three weeks thereafter, and heard of the nice time we had had at our picnic, and how we had been nearly stung to death by hornets; she declared that she would not be satisfied unless we did it over again; "the picnic, that is," she explained, "not the attack of the hornets."

I said that I thought it a little late in the season — it was November — for a picnic, and that we would be obliged to wear overcoats and mittens to keep warm. But Jeannie thought that we might build a large fire, and thus manage to keep comfortable.

"And then, we can have such fun, too," she added, 'gathering nuts, and I'll ask some of my city friends out to join us."

"As for your city friends," I answered, "I don't care

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how many of them come; but I think you will have to wait until next season for the nuts — they have all been gathered long ago."

"What a pity!" exclaimed Jeannie, and she sighed and looked ever so sorrowful.

"I did hope," she said, "that I could have one more picnic before I got married, but I fear my picnicing days are over."

"You must not think," said my wife, regarding Jeannie with surprise, "that, because you become a wife you can go to no more picnics and junketings. Never allow yourself to think thus, my dear, nor to act in accordance with such thought. Follow my example, Jeannie, and go to all the merry-makings you can. Am I not right, my dear?" turning to me.

"Certainly," I answered; "why, like Sir Toby Belch in the play, Jeannie, because she is going to be virtuously married, might as well ask if there shall be no more cakes and ale."

"Well, I am sure," said Jeannie, "I hope it will be as you say; but it has always seemed to me that married people had little time for picnics and gayeties of that character."

"But," I replied, "one don't want to be forever going to picnics, whether they be married or single; no more than one would care to be everlastingly eating and drinking cakes and ale. And now, as for this proposed picnic, why it shall come off, and we'll gather nuts from under the trees, and have a good time generally."

"Well, I don't know," said my wife, "where you will be able to find any nuts; for I remember, that although we searched very industriously, we scarcely obtained a handful."

"Never mind," I answered, "about the nuts; I think I know a couple of trees where we will find plenty of walnuts and chestnuts: so, Jeannie, you invite your friends, and I'll promise you we'll have lots of fun."

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So Jeannie named a day, and asked her friends; and the day came round and the friends too, and we all went to the picnic.

Now these young people were all city born and bred, and some of them, I really believe, had never been into the country beyond Central Park, so that the truly rural appearance of the woods was somewhat of a novelty to them. To be sure the trees were almost leafless, and the November wind was bleak, and the ground rather cold to sit upon; but when (as we did after a long search) we came across a couple of trees, standing side by side, with, oh, such quantities of walnuts and chestnuts scattered beneath them, it was a comfort to me to see how they enjoyed themselves. My wife confessed that she was surprised to find so many nuts, and wondered why the boys had not discovered them long ago. Jeannie, too, expressed astonishment, and wondered that the two trees should be so much like oak trees in appearance.

"The fact is," said Frank, in explanation, "that all trees when stripped of their foliage, resemble one another very closely. You remember what the good book says; "by their leaves shall ye know them."

Jeannie could not however call the passage to mind.

"The effect," I said, "of the frost on these nuts," taking up a handful of them, "is very noticeable. You will observe," turning to a young man whose mustache was very downy, "that by the action of the frost, the walnuts, with scarcely an exception, were cracked as skillfully as if they had been struck with a hammer, and the chestnuts could almost be said to possess the flavor of boiled ones."

The youth with the fuzzy chin and downy mustache said he had noticed the same, and was much struck therewith. Frank, the rascal, was at this moment taken with a sudden attack of coughing, which I was really afraid would throw him into a fit, which occurrence would materially have destroyed the enjoyment of our party. Fortunately no such

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thing happened, and the whole affair passed off most harmoniously. Indeed, my wife and Jeannie were in a constant giggle, as if there was a good joke somewhere which they were having alone by themselves. After a while even some of the city people seemed to have discovered it, and grew very merry over it.

"Frank," I said, after the picnic was all over, and Jeannie's city friends had taken the cars and gone home, and we two, late in the evening, were sitting over our night-caps of cakes and ale; "Frank," I repeated, seriously, "I am afraid that you will make Jeannie a bad husband; that you will be apt to deceive her."

"Gracious!" said Frank springing to his feet, upsetting his glass of ale, and scattering the crumbs of his cake on the carpet, "I hope not; what makes you think so?"

"Because you deceived me to-day," I answered, "and if you will play false with a brother-in-law before marriage, what may you not be expected to do with a wife after marriage."

"Oh," said Frank, sinking back into his chair, and refilling his ale goblet, "is that all?"

"All!" I echoed, "and is n't that enough? Do you know, my young friend, that you came very near getting me into a scrape to-day. If it had n't been for that idea of mine about the frost, I 'd have been in a pretty fix. When I asked you to buy for me a bushel or so of walnuts and chestnuts, I did not think you 'd get them cracked and boiled."

"Nor would I," said Frank "if the man from whom I bought them had had any others. But it was either those or none at all."

"But why," I asked, "did you scatter them under the oak trees? why not under the proper ones?"

"Well," said Frank, "if you had had to carry for half a mile and over as I had, a couple of bushel baskets filled with heavy nuts, in the hot sun, you would have dropped

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them under the first tree you came to, instead of tramping, as I did, half through the woods, looking for trees that I don't believe grow there. But did n't I," continued Frank, "come to your rescue nobly on the tree question?"

"Well, yes, Frank, you did," I said, "but your misquotation of 'leaves' for 'fruits' was abominable; still, considering all things, I'll forgive you."

And so I forgave him and went to bed.

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CHAPTER XXX.

ST. THOMAS'S DAY.

NOTHING can be better," I said to my wife, as, late in the evening, we drew closer around the fire in the library, "on this blustering December night; this initiatory of the holiday season — for it is St. Thomas's Day, the first festival preceding Christmas — than a mug of foaming ale and a plate of spiced cakes."

My wife approving of this, Jeannie went into the pantry for the cakes, and Frank down into the cellar for the ale. I think that Jeannie must also have joined Frank in the cellar, for I heard the sound of subdued laughter rising therefrom, and a remonstrating cry from Jeannie, who came back looking demurely enough, but with a face covered with blushes. I wondered to myself what Frank had been saying or doing to bring such color to her cheeks.

As we sat partaking of our cakes and ale, I said: "The Spirit of Christmas is with us. His shadow already falls on the floor, and his step is heard outside the window. He has scented our cakes and ale, and as soon as St. Thomas disappears over the threshold, he will enter, coming, as the old Christmas play of 'St. George and the Dragon' has it:

> 'Not to laugh or to jeer,
> But for a pocketful of cakes, and a skinful of beer.'"

"But what," asked my wife, seeing me take my favorite position on the rug before the blazing fire, which I only assume when desirous of discoursing wisely and learnedly

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on an interesting topic, "but what," she repeated, "have you to tell us about St. Thomas's Day?"

"Not much," I replied, "not much, my dear, except that it is a holiday in the Church and is dedicated to the Apostle Thomas. In the olden times in England, there were practised on this day certain ceremonies, some of which it may not be out of place to mention. One called the 'Hobby-horse Dance' is especially noticeable. This dance is described as being composed by a person a-straddle of a wooden horse and carrying in his hands a bow and arrow. This man, who was accompanied by six others, went round the town dancing the 'Heys,' and other country-dances. The feature in this mumming ceremony, however, which interests me most is, that to the above hobby-horse there belonged a pot, which was kept by turns by the reeves of the town, who provided cakes and ale to put into this pot: all people who had any kindness for the good intent of the institution of the sport, giving a pence apiece for themselves and families; and the money, after defraying the expense of the cakes and ale, went to repair the church, and support the poor."

"Either," said Frank, "the people must have given very liberally in those days, or else the church needed little repair, and the poor were contented with a mite."

"The 'Fool-Plough' is the name of another curious mumming custom," I continued. "It consists of a procession of 'sword-dancers,' in strange attire, dragging a plough, and getting donations of cakes from whoever chooses to give. 'St. George and the Dragon' is still played in parts of England, and also in Ireland, though in the latter country the championship is given to St. Patrick, who asserts that St. George was nothing more than St Patrick's boy, and fed his horses."

"After that," said Frank, who has a drop or two of Irish blood in his veins, "I think I 'll quaff another mug of ale."

"Do," I answered, "for, as the old song in ex-ale-tation of ale runs:—

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'It helps speech and wit; and it hurts not a whit,
But rather does further the virtues morale;
Then think it not much of a little to touch
The good moral parts of a pot of good ale.

'To the Church and Religion it is a good friend,
Or else our forefathers their wisdom did fail,
That at every mile next to the church stile
Sat a consecrate house to a pot of good ale.'"

"And this be truly, as one may say," exclaimed Frank quaffing the amber-colored liquor before him, "good ale."

"It is," I replied, following his example, and then, wiping the froth of "October" from my lips, "but all ale is not good ale, as is easily discovered by tasting. Even in the olden times they had poor ale, as we read in the 'Virtue of Sack,' which is printed among Beaumont's poems: —

'This muddy drench of ale does taste too much
Of earth; the malt retains a scurvy touch
Of the dull hand that sows it; and I fear
There 's heresy in hops.'

But this is a disagreeable view of the subject and must not be lingered upon. Let me speak only of good ale and in praise of it — though, going back to the ale song above quoted, I shall finally be obliged to say with the poet: —

'O ale *ab alendo*, thou liquor of life!
That I had but a mouth as big as a whale,
For mine is too little to touch the least tittle
That belongs to the praise of a pot of good ale.'"

"I don't know about that," exclaimed my wife, "for my part, I think you have sung in verse the praise of ale about as well as any one can. There is your 'Runlet of Ale,' I am sure, written in compliment to your friends the Taylors, and by them inscribed as a memorial to their father, which even you should not altogether overlook."

"This reminds me," I continued, after a pause, which I filled with a mug of my friends' ale, "that that dear old poet, Fitz Greene Halleck, in acknowledgment of a copy of the Ale book sent to him, wrote to me, shortly before his

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death, a most delightful letter, portions of which, *apropos* of our subject, you will like to hear. Nor do I think it will be a violation of confidence, if I permit others than yourselves to hear it: —

"'The volume,' he writes, 'whether regarded as a work of artistic excellence, mental and mechanical, or fancifully, as a vase worthy of containing the "celestial beverage" it immortalises, is, indeed, one of those "things of beauty," which our favorite, John Keats, whom Lord Byron used to call John Ketch, has poetically pronounced "a joy forever."

"'I have, hitherto, believed that Shakespeare, in the two lines from the experienced lips of that good judge of the article, Christopher Sly, on his imaginary marriage-eve — namely: —

"Bring our lady hither to our sight,
And, once again, a pot of the smallest ALE,"

had anticipated all future eulogies upon the subject of your volume. How well he expresses the affinity between beer and beauty; between matrimony and mild ale, and the luxury enjoyed by the bride and bridegroom, "when," as Coriolanus says, "their wedding-day is done and tapers burn to bedward," in blending their hopes of happiness with a mug or two of double XX, half and half, in one harmonious whole.

"'And I cannot pay your ale a higher compliment than by saying that, under its inspiration, you and your friend have, by your elaborate searches for the facts of ancient and modern song and story, in honor of your exalted theme, most marvellously "gilded the refined gold, painted the lily, and added a perfume to the violet" of Shakespeare and Christopher Sly.

"'Repeating my thanks for your courtesy, I beg you to believe me, my dear sir, alike in boyish jest and manly earnest, "'Faithfully yours,

"'FITZ GREENE HALLECK.'"

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"An admirable letter," said Frank, "replete with sparkling wit and genial humor."

"And to think," I said, "that the genial Jack should have failed in his portion of the Ale book to quote from Halleck's famous 'Barrel of Porter.' It was an unaccountable oversight, and can only be accounted for upon the grounds that those things which are the nearest and dearest to us, we ofttimes overlook. And now, Frank, as it is getting late, suppose we take another mug of ale, and then to bedward."

"Why will you persist," asked my wife, as I filled our pewters up, "in drinking ale out of those mugs instead of from these tall and hour-glass-shaped French goblets?"

"Because," I replied, "the chemical action which takes place gives a quaint flavor to the ale, most agreeable to the palate. In olden times leathern cups were used. These were called black jacks, and such was their size that a party of Frenchmen who visited London in 1650, reported on their return home that the English drank ale out of their boots. Small jacks, tipt with silver, were also in use. Silver cups were also fashionable at a later period. Southey says that roasted porter was in vogue in Sir George Beaumont's youth, and he (Sir George) had a set of silver cups made for the purpose. They were brought red hot to table, the porter or ale was poured into them in that state, when the liquor, foaming over, cooled them. This is very much like our flip made with a hot poker.

"A tavern exploit in Charles II.'s time was to swallow a live frog in a glass of ale. What the effect was is not told, but we presume that

> 'The man recovered from the drink,
> The frog it was that died.'"

"You are getting, I think," said my wife, "to be a little rambling, and as the ale is out, it is best to put out the lights and go to bed."

"Hold," I cried, "ale, my dear, 'audacious ale, as Beau-

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mont and Fletcher call it in one of their plays, is a drink for a christening; for B. & F. aforesaid say in the *Captain*, 'you shall have their children christened in mulled ale, and at five years old able to knock a Dane down.' It is good for a breakfast: for what says Cotton in the *Compleat Angler*—'My diet is always one glass (of ale) so soon as I am dressed, and no more till dinner.' It is good for a wedding where, as in the *Scornful Lady:* 'All the ale and cakes were eat and drunk off.' It is good for the parson, since in the *Woman's Prize* we read: 'Oh, the parson! twenty to one you'll find him at the Bush; there's the best ale.' It is good for uncles, as in Shadwell's *Lancashire Witches*, we find this bit of reading: —

"'I am your uncle.'

"*Sir Tim.*—'Yes, my father's younger brother. What a murrain do we keep you for, but to have an eye over our dogs and hawks, to drink ale with the tenants (when they come with rent or presents) in black jacks, at the upper end of a brown shuffle-board table in the hall.'

"Nor, in conclusion, is it bad to have at a funeral, for *Aubrey of Gentilisme*, writing about 1640, says: 'In the county of Hereford was an old custom at funerals to hire poor people, who were to take upon them all the sins of the party deceased, and were called sin-eaters. The manner was thus: when the corpse was brought out of the house, and laid on the bier, a loaf of bread was delivered to the sin-eater over the corpse, as also a mazar-bowl (a gossip's bowl of maple) full of beer, which he was to drink up, and sixpence in money; in consequence whereof he took upon him *ipso facto*, all the sins of the defunct, and freed him or her from walking after they were dead."

I turned around and looked at my audience. My wife was nodding in her chair, Frank was raking the ashes over the coals on the hearth, and Jeannie had disappeared. I roused my wife from her dreamings, and, as she crept sleepily up stairs, she managed to say that she was highly

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pleased with my discourse, but that I had forgotten to relate much about St. Thomas's Day.

"But I said a good deal about cakes and ale," I replied, "especially about ale."

"Yes," my wife answered, "but, why, I wonder," stopping at the head of the stairs, and turning around to look at me, who still lingered at the foot, fastening the front door and putting out the hall-light, "do we not take more interest in, and celebrate in an appropriate manner St. Thomas's Day?"

"Well, the only reason I can think of just now," I replied, "is, it is so short a day, (one of the two or three briefest, if not indeed, the very briefest of all the days in the year,) that we fast Americans hardly think it to be worth our whiles to celebrate it. A day that don't get up until eight or nine o'clock in the morning, and goes to bed between three and four in the afternoon, is not worth taking much pains about. Why, one of our military processions, if desirous of joining in the festivities of St. Thomas's Day, would have to start from the Battery, in its march to Madison Square, before sunrise, to enable its leading columns to get back on its return, even so far as the City Hall Park before sunset; and as for the rear column, our worthy mayor, to review it, would have to remain all night on the Hall steps before it made its appearance. Indeed, we even have to commence the celebration of Christmas the night before to enable us to finish it up on the morning of the third day. No, no, my dear, St. Thomas was a very good Apostle, barring his unbelieving spirit, but the days we celebrate must, like our National Anniversary, wake up very early in the morning and drop to sleep only very late at night. We must have plenty of time in them to eat and drink our cakes and ale, and enjoy them to the utmost."

And so ended St. Thomas's Day.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

CHRISTMAS.

NOTHING can be better in the country than Christmas, and no other day in all the year is so crowded with "cakes and ale." On this day childhood throughout Christendom holds high carnival and makes merry with song and dance. Our own three little ones woke us early on Christmas morning by coming to our bedside and singing a Christmas carol. This was intended by them as a surprise to papa and mamma; which, if we had not heard them practising it under Aunt Jeannie's instruction, in the nursery every morning and evening, before they were up and after they went to bed, for a couple of weeks past, it might have been. As it was, however, both papa and mamma had been unusually oblivious to all musical sounds, though I believe papa did ask them, one morning at the breakfast-table, what that comic song was they were singing so early in the morning. This calling their Christmas carol a comic song, struck the children as being very funny, and made them laugh merrily. They felt very certain, too, that I knew nothing of their secret, and that they would give me an agreeable surprise on Christmas morning. Therefore it was, when I heard their sweet voices breaking forth from their red lips, singing, "We three Kings of Orient are," that both their mother and myself were as much surprised as we could well be, and that we wondered aloud who could it possibly be at our bedside, before it was light, waking and making our hearts glad with so sweet a Christmas carol. They did n't

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look much like three kings, though, in their long white night-gowns, but more like three angels — at least so their mother remarked; but I said "Oh, no! I think they are the kings Gaspard, Melchior, and Balthasar. I can almost see in their hands the crowns and gifts of gold, and I 'm sure I smell frankincense and myrrh."

This, or something like it, their mother and myself spoke to each other between the singing of the verses; but when the carol was finished, they broke forth into such a torrent of "Merry Christmases" that it was impossible to be deceived any longer, and we were obliged to acknowledge that they were our little Em, and Willie, and Mary. They did not remain long to have us recognize them, however, but ran quickly down stairs to the library to get their stockings, which they had carefully hung by the fireplace, and which Santa Claus had filled with many little tokens of his regard. The Christmas-tree of the night before had, to a large extent, taken the place of the good old saint in the matter of making presents, and, though I was obliged to yield to the voice of the majority in regard to having the Christmas-tree, yet I would not allow the children to be deprived of hanging up their stockings. The Christmas-tree is a very pretty affair, and looks well, filled with gifts and glittering stars, and lighted by burning candles; but I am rather old-fashioned in my views, and prefer Santa Claus and the stockings. So it was that their mother and aunty managed the tree, and I took charge of the stockings — that is, I saw to their being properly hung, for Santa Claus, of course, attended to the filling of them.

The Christmas-tree was really a very fine affair, and as, in talking of Christmas, one ought to commence at its beginning, which, as every body knows, is Christmas Eve, it is only proper for me to tell what I know of that tree, and the many pretty things which were hung upon it.

First, in relation to the getting of that tree. It was a pretty good day's work for my ten years' oldling and his

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two sisters, to go to the woods, a half-mile away from my cottage, and select and cut down and bring home that tree, and the accompanying evergreens and laurel for trimming the rooms. It was a bright, sunshiny morning a few days before Christmas that, taking their sleighs, they set off for the woods, to accomplish this task. There had been a slight fall of snow the night previous, and the ground was covered with a white robe, so that the sleighs ran smoothly along, except when they crossed the wide road where the ruts were. It was a pleasant sight to see that sturdy, rosy-cheeked boy drawing his two sisters along; Em sat on the large sleigh, to which was attached the small one, on which little Mary sat; and as I watched them, before I went to town, disappearing down the road, I was very thankful that I had them to increase the joys and pleasures of my life.

When I returned home at night, they each had a long story to tell me of the troubles they encountered in obtaining the tree and getting it home, and what fun they had poking amid the snow in search of ground-pine and red berries. At noon, too, they began to get hungry; but they made up their minds, though, not to go home until they had the tree, and all the evergreens they wanted. So it was three o'clock before they came back, and they were all "just as hungry," so Em said, "as little bears." Though how she discovered the hungriness of little bears, I never thought to ask her.

I will confess that the Christmas-tree, dressed out as it was by Aunt Jeannie and Frank, was a great success; and when, on Christmas Eve, several of our neighbors, with their little ones, assembled in the library, the presents all being arranged upon the tree and the candles lighted, I have seldom looked on a more pleasant scene. It was marvelous to me, the amount of enjoyment these children found in their "cakes and ale." They clapped their hands, dancing with delight and shouting gleefully when their eyes first

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fell upon the tree, crowded with its many gifts, and each in a moment singled out the one he or she most desired. So nicely had their various tastes been studied that each had exactly that for which she wished. I cannot, of course, recount every thing on the tree, nor how they were distributed; enough that every little girl got a doll, and a book, and some candies, besides other things, both useful and ornamental; and every little boy a drum, and book, and more candies. Mamma, and aunty, and the other ladies, received some magnificent presents, while poor papa got, among other gifts, a pair of spectacles. This was a token to papa that whoever gave it to him thought that he was getting old and needed them. Every body laughed when papa put on his spectacles, and evidently thought that it was a good joke; but somehow papa did not see much fun in it. He remembered the time when grandpapa had put on spectacles, and that from that time he began to regard him as an old man; and now here was papa doing the same thing. And this set papa to thinking, and counting up the years of his life, and he was surprised to find that he was two score. But this did not prevent him from playing afterward "Hunt the Slipper," and "Puss in the Corner," and "Blind Man's Buff" with the children. And then we had the game of "Forfeits," wherein every body kissed every body else, more or less. It was very, very late before all of the little folks went home, and then, when they had gone, my little ones hung up their stockings, and though they tried hard enough to keep awake — for the old sand-man all the while kept dropping sand into their sleepy little eyes — they were at last compelled to kiss papa and mamma good-night, and go to bed. They went off in very good order, though, the boy taking the lead, and, though he had one eye closed, and staggered along under the weight of his presents, he managed to beat a victorious march on his drum. The two little girls brought up the rear, and tried to keep step to the music. Aunty went up with them to tuck them

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in and hear them say their prayers; but when she came down, she told us that they could n't do it; that, though their intentions were good, they had dropped off to sleep right in the middle of their "Now I lay me." They generally say their prayers kneeling at the bedside; but the kneeling part was dispensed with, on this occasion, because they declared themselves too tired to kneel, and promised to say them after they got into bed. I am afraid that this omission will prove an unwise precedent; but, if the recording angel made any note of it, aunty has probably become responsible for it.

Then, with several friends, seated before the blazing fire, we waited for old Christmas to come in. Tender songs were sung, and pleasant tales told the while, of the Christmas Eves of long ago, when younger and fairer, though not so wise in our own esteem, perhaps, as now, we made merry with many a one who has long worn the white robe of righteousness and sung the songs of David in that better land.

Hardly had the great bell at the college struck the hour of midnight, and while its vibrations still rung through the cold starlighted sky, when three female voices rose from our midst in an exultant Christmas hymn, proclaiming

> "Christ was born on Christmas Day,
> Wreathe the holly, twine the bay,
> *Christus natus hodie.*"

Yes! Christmas had come. The day which we keep as the anniversary of the birth, in a lowly manger at Bethlehem, of our Saviour, who came to redeem the world from sin, and bring "Peace on earth, good will to man."

After the hymn we had more Christmas talk, not so reminiscent in its character, and more songs were sung and stories told, and then we had a bowl of mulled ale, and, while we were discussing it, who should come sliding down the chimney but old Santa Claus! We made room for him in our circle straightway, and though we tried to have him

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stay and spend an hour with us, he resolutely declined, saying he had so many stockings to fill that, if he accepted our invitation, he would n't be able to get through his pleasant task before cock-crow; however, he remained long enough with us to drink a mug of steaming ale, and then, after filling the stockings that hung beneath the mantel, he, in the legendary and accepted way, "turned with a jerk, and laying his finger aside of his nose, and giving a nod, up the chimney he rose." Of course we heard, in a twinkling thereafter, the pawing of his reindeer steeds on the roof, and caught, as we bowed forward toward the fireplace, as the sound came down the chimney, his welcome shout of "Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good-night."

And we, following Santa Claus's example, wished each other a merry Christmas, and bidding good-night, retired to our Christmas slumbers.

What our little ones found in their stockings — how many cakes and how much ale — on Christmas morning, must ever remain a mystery to my readers — only papa, and mamma, and aunty are permitted to know; but that they highly enjoyed their contents no one who saw their happy faces would be inclined to deny. The day passed quietly away, every body going to church in the morning, and, in the afternoon, the young folks occupied themselves in playing with their new presents, and the older folks in reading or writing. The great event of the day took place about four o'clock, when dinner was announced, and the entire family, with the addition of two or three friends, sat down to an old-fashioned Christmas dinner. Now, nothing can be better than a Christmas dinner; such a dinner as, from time immemorial, when great-grandmothers ruled the roast, had received the encomiums from the heads of our house for successive generations. A turkey larger and better than any peacock ever trussed, graced one end of the table; at the other rose a mammoth game-pie, before which the famous four-and-twenty-blackbird-pie of antiquity

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would sink into insignificance; a goose, which was doubtless a lineal descendant of one of the historical geese that saved Rome, stood in the centre; this was flanked on one side by a pair of ducks, the canvas on whose backs was sufficient to have made a sail for a small-sized vessel, and on the other by a pair of boiled chickens, much tenderer than those which belong to Mother Carey, and more palatable. Other dishes graced the table, and even after the meats were removed, and the hereditary plum-pudding, with its army of mince, pumpkin, apple, and other pies, and its skirmishers of tarts and custards, and its followers of nuts and raisins, took their places, the mahogany still groaned under the weight placed upon it, and refused to be comforted, until drowned, like Clarence, in a butt of wine.

After dinner, when we all met in the library, over our cups of tea or coffee, and the fire was blazing merrily on the hearth, filling the room with light and warmth, and before the lamps were turned up, papa was called upon for a Christmas story. But papa, with that happy facility of rejoinder which papas alone possess, and which puts a quietus upon the most persistent of children, pleaded weariness, and recommended them to apply to Aunt Jeannie, who could repeat all manner of stories, and with much more grace than papa could. I promised, however, that, if they remained good children until New Year's Day, I would then tell them one of my best stories. So they went to Aunt Jeannie, and she told them the loveliest of fairy tales, and papa laid down on the lounge and took a short nap. It was late, however, when papa awoke, and the little ones, who had been listening to Aunt Jeannie and singing and playing among themselves afterward, grew quite sleepy, and even the grown-up folks winked their eyes wearily, and said it was time to go to bed. And so, raking up the embers on the hearth, we said sadly to each other, Christmas is over.

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CHAPTER XXXII.

A CHRISTMAS STORY.

NOTWITHSTANDING that Jeannie is going to be married before the year is out; and there is much bustle in the cottage caused thereby; and many private consultations arising therefrom; and a display of gleaming ribbons and mistlike laces continually coming between my eyes and the pictures hanging on the walls, yet for all these things, my wife and the little ones, and even Jeannie herself, have found time to entreat me, during this holiday week, for a Christmas story. So, getting my motive from the old house which rises gloomily amidst the ancient trees in the deserted garden over the way, and the gables of which, with its crumbling chimneys, I can plainly discern from the window where I sit, I let my imagination weave a Christmas fantasy, which I read aloud to my household, and term it the story of

THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

PART I.

It was an old house: so old, indeed, that no one living remembered when it was built. The moss, wherein the meadow larks used to make their nests, grew thickly on its roof. In its wide-mouthed chimneys thousands of swallows dwelt, and in the garret a colony of pigeons yearly reared its young. Crows, many of them gray with age, lived in the great pines, older than the house itself, which grew closely about it, spreading their heavy branches over it, and keeping the sunshine from entering its small paned windows.

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The rooms were large and gloomy, and had a mouldy smell. All the doors throughout the house had wide cracks at the top and bottom, and, when opened upon their rusted hinges, groaned as if in pain. The window-shutters — at least those which were still held in place by their hinges — used to slam to and fro, on windy nights, in a most reckless manner, and seemingly held fearful talk with the loosened clapboards that beat themselves frightfully against the worm-eaten framework of the house itself. In the garden, the box which once bordered the flower-beds had grown tall and scraggy, and weeds and nettles had taken the place of flowers.

Of course, nobody lived in the old house, nor had for many years, because it was haunted. And not only was the old house haunted, but also the grounds surrounding it, and no one, for ever so long a time, had dared to put foot upon them, and, much less, to venture into the house itself.

All the villagers — for the house stood in a little country village, not more than a dozen miles from the great city of New York — avoided, as far as possible, the neighborhood of this haunted spot, and at night, or even late in the afternoon of a gloomy November day, would go a mile out of their road in preference to passing it.

Little boys and girls, on their way to and from Sunday-school, even on a bright, sunshiny day in summer, would run, with swift feet, pale faces, and quivering hearts, past the old gateway leading into the grounds surrounding it. The old women gossips of the village used to talk about it over their cups of tea, and the idlers around the village tavern, smoking their pipes, of stormy winter nights, told horrible stories concerning it. But for all this, no one seemed to know why or how it was haunted. They only knew that it was so; for had they not heard their fathers and mothers tell of it, ages before, and, therefore, it must be true. And so the years went by, and the crows cawed in the tall trees,

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and the swallows went in and out of the unused chimneys, and the pigeons cooed and brooded above their young in the deserted garrets, and the rats and mice had it their own way between the walls and ceilings, and the moss grew more and more on its roof, and the shutters and clapboards slammed and banged, unnoted, and the wind shrieked and howled around its gables just as much as it liked, and there was no one to say nay or put a stop to any of these lawless proceedings.

But, one day, just as the sun began to send long shadows across the valley, and the cows were going home to be milked, an old man, with a long gray beard, and dusty and travel-stained in appearance, came up an unfrequented road, and, stopping at the fork where another road diverged, rested his hands upon his tall staff, and seemed to be in a quandary as to which course to take; but the next moment however, seemingly reassured in his own mind, he turned his steps toward the path leading to the haunted house.

The loungers about the tavern and post-office had watched him as he went past, and had asked each other who he could be. But none knew. The old women, sitting on their door-steps in the mellow sunshine, raised their eyes from their knitting and peered at him through their spectacles as he passed along, and then made signs to their neighbors across the street to look. Some of them, even, with their knitting in their hands, stepped to their garden fence, and asked their neighbors sage questions concerning him; which, however, none of them could answer. The children ceased making dirt-pies in the road to stare at him, and even the cows stood still a moment to gaze at his queer figure.

When, therefore, he was seen to turn into the path leading to the haunted house, great excitement took place in the village. The loungers at the tavern dropped their pipes out of their mouths, and stood scratching their heads in blank amazement; all the women commenced talking

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in loud, shrill tones to each other at the same moment; so that none could understand a word that the other was saying. The boys and girls screamed with fright; the dogs barked; the geese gabbled; and the cocks and hens immediately scudded home to roost.

Only one man in all the village seemed to know what to do, and he was young Tawly, the blacksmith. When he heard the uproar, he came out of his shop, leaving the red-hot horseshoe he was welding, to cool on his anvil, and, wiping with his leather apron the sweat from his forehead, demanded to know the cause of the uproar.

A dozen persons at once answered him; but he ordered all, save the tavern-keeper, a good friend of his, to be silent, and Van Bust then told him, in a few words, what had happened. Tawly, as soon as he understood the matter, did not waste a moment, but started to overtake the stranger, and warn him not to venture into the haunted grounds. Of course, the village folk followed at the heels of the blacksmith; but he outstripped them, and came to the road branching off to the haunted grounds just as the old man passed through the gate. Tawly shouted loudly for him to return; but either the stranger was deaf, and did not hear, or else he would not, for he paid no attention to the shouts of Tawly; or, indeed, to those of the entire population, who, by this time, had reached the fork in the road, and there stood, screaming at the top of their voices.

Now, the blacksmith was a brave man, and would no more hesitate to take the hoof of the most vicious horse in the world between his knees, than would a mother to take her babe upon her lap. But he was mortal, however, and, having been educated to believe in the haunted character of the old house, it is not to be expected that he would care to venture within its shadow. Had it not been, therefore, for the circumstance that there was one person in the crowd who did not believe in haunted houses, in whose re-

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gard the blacksmith wished to occupy the foremost place, it is very much to be doubted whether he would not have remained with the others at the entrance to the road, nor ventured, as he did, however, to follow the stranger into the haunted grounds. To stand well in the eyes of pretty Kate Mayton, who had not lived all her life — albeit it had not as yet been a very long one — in this dull little village, our blacksmith would have been willing to risk much more than he did. He had often heard Kate declare her disbelief in ghosts and hobgoblins, and especially her utter want of faith in regard to the old Powell house — for so it was called, though why, nobody could tell — being haunted. She had even said that she intended some day to visit it herself, and had repeatedly declared, in the presence of Tawly, that she would n't give the snap of her fingers for a man who was afraid to sleep therein.

Now, the blacksmith had half-promised her that some night he would sleep there, but he had kept postponing this act, hoping that Kate would, after a while, relent, or that he would be able to get one of his companions to join him. Nothing could induce any of them, however, to do so fool-hardy and reckless a thing, and Tawly had nearly made up his mind to attempt it alone, when this unexpected opportunity of having a companion in the house presented itself to him.

Without saying a word of his intentions to the throng surrounding him, and only giving one glance at Kate, who answered it with a smile of encouragement, he darted after the old man. As he went along he thought to himself, this stranger, probably, knows nothing about the reputation which this house possesses, and he undoubtedly is in search of a place where he may rest over night. Fate has led his footsteps to this haunted house, and I will say nothing to him of the bad name it bears; but will let him imagine that I live there. It did occur to him, however, that it was strange the old man had not gone to the tavern

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if he wanted a night's lodging, instead of turning off into this grass-grown and neglected spot.

It did not surprise the bluff young blacksmith to find, when he reached the gateway, that the old man had disappeared among the wild vines and bushes which interlaced each other above and across what had been the main walk in the garden. It was with difficulty, however, that he could force his own steps through the tangled mass. Each tree and shrub, as he went along, seemed, by springing into his face, to oppose his progress. Once a snake glided across his path, and then a warted toad sprung from under his steps. Strange noises, too, filled the air, and, though they were only the sighing of the light breeze through the pine trees, yet they seemed to him weird and fearful. As he went farther in, the trees rose more thickly about him, and the sunshine of the summer afternoon faded into a dim twilight. The crows cawed ominously above him in the tree-tops; an owl hooted fearfully at him from a thicket; a bat dashed madly by him; the swallows whirled wildly around his head; and, as he paused a moment to pick his way, a dull, heavy sound, succeeded by a rattling of chains, reached his ears.

This noise, instead of deterring him from advancing, was too familiar in its character, too much like that which he was accustomed to hear every day at his forge, to intimidate him. So pressing on even more boldly than at first, he soon reached the front door of the mansion, which stood wide open, allowing him freely to pass in.

No sooner, however, had he entered than the door was closed with a loud crash, rattling of chains following it, and he found himself in total darkness, and evidently a prisoner. He thought, too, he heard the noise of some one moving near him, and stretched forth his hands to find who it was. His hands met other hands groping for him. They were cold, clammy-feeling hands, while his own were dry and burning. They possessed strength, too, as the blacksmith

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found, and drew him forcibly toward them. Perhaps the strength was more of a mesmeric nature, however, than of that kind which enabled the blacksmith to wield his heavy sledges — at all events, these hands drew him along, and only loosened their hold when their owner, reaching a door at the further end of the hall, pushed it open with his feet, and shoved the blacksmith through it into the garden at the rear of the house. The door swung back; the rattling of chains was heard; a chuckling laugh of satisfaction fol lowed, and then all was still.

Tawly rose from the ground where he had fallen and looked about him. He could not help smiling as he thought of the way in which he had gone through that house.

"In at the front door and out at the back," he murmured, "and never a word spoken between the host and the visitor. It beats any thing I ever heard of, and I really believe the place is haunted, but not by spirits. Those hands belong to a live man; and, if there are only men to deal with, I think I am equal to encountering them. I confess, though, that those hands have the grip of the Evil One in them. Still, I am going to solve this riddle of years, and find out, if possible, who haunts the house. Lights, I know, have been seen, at times, gleaming from these windows, and strange noises have been heard. The disturbances grow more marked as the year advances to its close, and, during the Christmas week, the house is often observed to be lighted up from top to bottom, as for a ball, and the sounds of music and merry-makings, intermingled with cries and groans, are borne on the icy midnight air."

The blacksmith said or rather whispered this to himself as he stood gazing, in the falling twilight, at the door and windows of the old house. No light shone forth from any of them, and not a sound was heard to arise from its interior. Tawly proceeded to try the doors from whence he had made his entrance and exit, and found them locked.

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He essayed to gain an entrance at the lower windows; but they also were closed against his efforts. He scaled a low porch, and tried the windows on the second floor, but with no better success. He rattled and hammered at the doors without attracting any attention, and was obliged, at last, to give up for the night his purpose of remaining there.

He crept home without being observed, and the next morning early, before the inhabitants of the village were stirring, he, carrying a sledge hammer, returned to the old house. He might as well have left the hammer behind him; for he found the doors standing wide open, and the windows unshuttered and unfastened. He passed quietly into the house, and through the various rooms, without meeting any one or seeing any thing differing essentially from what is to be encountered in any old deserted mansion. Once, however, he thought he heard coming from the great chimney rising through the centre of the house, the same chuckling laughter which had greeted him when tossed so unceremoniously the night before into the garden. He stooped down in front of the big fire-place before him, and looked up through the wide chimney. He saw the white clouds sailing along the blue sky, far above the house top, and in the chimney, clinging to its sides, the nests of a few swallows, the twitting of which he had probably mistaken for the laughter of his assailant.

A few ancient pieces of furniture were scattered through the rooms, and the curtains, which hung before the windows, were moth-eaten and tattered. Dust and cobwebs had gathered over every thing. Several portraits of men and women of a by-gone age, attired in quaint old-fashioned garments, hung on the walls, and, if one could judge by the staring manner in which they severally regarded Tawly, they were as greatly surprised to see him as he was to see them. The picture of an old man, with a long, white beard, and clad in a dress composed almost entirely of furs, especially attracted his attention. It al-

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most seemed to him that the eyes of the portrait followed him about the room, and, when he left it, he could have averred that the chuckle of laughter which reached his ears as he closed the door, proceeded directly from this picture. So fully impressed was he with this idea that he visited the old house the following day, expressly to take another look at this portrait; but, to his surprise, he discovered that the portrait had disappeared, and where it hung appeared an oak panel, corresponding to others in the room. That the portrait had been there Tawly was positive, and that it had mysteriously disappeared he was equally as certain. He examined the panel carefully, but could not discover that it differed in any particular from the others. There was no sign of a portrait ever having occupied it, and yet it was evident to Tawly that a portrait was needed there, not only to correspond with those on the opposite side of the room, but also to keep in countenance the portrait of an old lady, with a yellow turban and large feather fan, who looked lonely and disconsolate without a companion. Tawly was, as he confessed afterward, startled by this occurrence, and knew not what to make of it. He began to think that the house was indeed haunted, and not only by beings with strong hands, but by spirits. But the more he thought about it, the less could he understand it.

That Tawly was asked a thousand questions by the curious villagers in regard to his adventures in the haunted house, was not surprising; and that he answered them with frightful stories concerning the unearthly noises he had there heard, and the fearful scenes he had witnessed, was to be expected. But that Kate Mayton should not deign to ask a single question of him, and indeed, only laughed at him when she met him, was something that our hero could not understand. All that she ever said to him in relation to the matter was that, when he had slept in the haunted house, he might come to her and give her an account of his experiences.

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This behavior of pretty Kate's made the blacksmith quite sorrowful. He no longer whistled as of wont, as he hammered out on his anvil clumsy horseshoes, or blew, with lusty arms, the great leather bellows. He grew quite moody, and kept away from the village merry-makings, and even neglected to attend church, where, in the days past, he used to sing beside Kate in the choir. He went oftener, though, to the tavern, neglecting his business and spending much time there with boon companions. It was quite evident to the good folks of the village that he was going to the bad, and they all declared it was owing to his having ventured within the precincts of the haunted house. In short, it was said that Tawly himself was haunted, and that, if all the horseshoes he had ever made could be fastened above the door of his forge, they would fail to keep away the goblins. And so Tawly went from bad to worse, and ran up a tall score with Van Bust for unlimited pipes and endless mugs of ale.

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CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE STORY FOR CHRISTMAS.

TO-MORROW, my dear," I say to my wife, as we gather around the tea-urn in the library, "will be Jeannie's wedding-day, and as I know you both have many affairs to attend to, suppose we let the conclusion of my story rest until Jeannie comes back to us a married woman?"

But Jeannie would not listen to this, and said that she should not enjoy her honey-moon at all unless she knew all about the haunted house, and how Tawly's love affair prospered. So without more ado I continued my story in these words: —

PART II.

Thus the summer passed away, and the autumn came and went. The apples were gathered and stored. Some of them, turned into cider, were put away in barrels down in cellars, to be tapped at Thanksgiving and Christmas times. The pumpkins, too, were housed, and little boys and girls already dreamed of pumpkin pies, and a few indiscreet housewives even went so far as to venture to make a baking of them before the cold weather set in. The corn was gathered into the barns. The wheat was garnered. The horses in their stalls had wafted to their nostrils, through cracks and crevices, the scent of newly-threshed oats, and the savor of dried clover-tops. The cows chose the sunny sides of barns, where they soberly chewed their cuds. Turkeys and young roosters, ducks and geese, gobbled and crowed, and quacked and cackled, as it neared Thanksgiv

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ing time, putting on superior airs, and making as much noise, accompanied with as little sense, as would be found in the after-dinner speeches of many of the well-meaning, but preposterous people, who would linger around the mahogany where these fowls, stuffed with all manner of savory herbs, had been served up.

The snow, too, came, and lay in great sheets of white through the streets and lanes of the village, and was banked up against the fences, and stood in drifts by the sides of the road, waist-deep to the children who waded through them going to school. In the road, though, leading to the haunted house, where the northeast wind came sweeping across it, the ground was bare and frozen in ridges. Through the neglected garden, however, the snow lay deep, and was piled in fantastic shapes. It sifted down upon the roof of the house through the leafy pines, and filled the nests of the departed larks. It fell in great flakes down the chimneys, and drove the swallows to other homes. The pigeons in the garret, as the blast whirled in at the open windows, grew chill, and nestled more closely to each other; a few crows, too old for distant flights, hid themselves amid the close boughs of a neighboring hemlock, and the ancient owls found nests for the winter in a hollow oak. The rats and mice gnawed and nibbled away, however, at the old pantry door, and ran over, with seeming satisfaction, the mouldy shelves where, once on a time, bread and cheese had been stored.

The portraits on the walls looked older and colder than ever, the shutters and clapboards rattled more violently, and the strange noises and mysterious laughters increased as the year waned. Tawly, too, got worse and worse. He entirely neglected his business. The fire went out on the forge, the bellows became wheezy, and the anvil and sledge hammers grew rusty from disuse. The blacksmith found Van Bust's tap-room cosier and warmer than his shop, and took kindly to spiced ale, with roasted apples swimming

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therein. Kate he never went near, and kept aloof from all places where he would be likely to meet her. She, for her part, did not seem greatly to mind his absence, but flirted complacently with all the beaux in the village, going to sleigh-rides and dancing-parties with them night after night. It was said, though, by the gossips, that when Kate was alone in her own room, she had many a long crying spell on account of Tawly's actions, and that, in her inmost heart, she loved him better than ever.

However this may be, Tawly did not know it; but, on the contrary, thought that Kate cared nothing for him, and, consequently, he would care nothing for her.

Such a state of feeling, however, between two persons who really love each other, cannot last forever. Although Providence often thinks it necessary to prevent the course of true love from running smoothly, it nevertheless does it, I think, more to try or prove their affection, than with a wish to turn it aside and destroy it. Some one, I think it must be that genial fellow, Saxe, has said, that "Love goes up as mercury goes down," and, for my part, I intend, before I finish this story, to prove this axiom.

One bitter cold night, as it drew toward Christmas, Tawly, seated in the tap-room of "The Last but One" — for this was the name of Van Bust's tavern, though not even he knew why it had this name, but which I will explain in this wise: In the good old days when stage-coaches ran from New York to Boston, about the time when the haunted house was not haunted, this tavern was the last but one where the stage on the road to New York stopped to change horses, and, consequently — but why seek to explain the matter more clearly? Let us go back to Tawly. Tawly, I say, seated in the tap-room of "The Last but One," watching the wood fire blazing on the hearth, and further engaged in drinking great mugs of hot spiced ale, all at once heard a tap on the window pane, close by where he sat. He was a little drowsy, and at first he thought the

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sound proceeded from the frost forming on the window glass, for it was, as I have stated, a bitter cold night. A second tap, however, brought him to his feet, and, wondering who it could be, he slipped gently out of the room, and going to the door, looked forth.

By the light of the full moon, which shone brightly, he distinctly perceived the figure of an old man, with a long, white beard, and clad in furs. He recognized it, too, as that of the mysterious portrait which appeared and disappeared, at pleasure, in the haunted house. To say that Tawly was a little startled at this apparition would not be declaring too much. He was startled, and, when the figure beckoned to him to come forth, Tawly's knees for an instant — it may have been longer — trembled. He would like to have gone back, too, for his overcoat and mittens, but the phantom, or portrait, or whatever it was, was peremptory in his wishes, and, moreover, seemed to exercise over Tawly's will an influence which he could not resist.

So Tawly went forth into the night with its icy atmosphere, following, in silence, a few steps behind the phantom old man. The cold moon glared unsympathizingly down upon him, the stars glanced sharply at him, and the snow crackled and creaked beneath his feet as he walked. Tawly would have given much to have been able to return to the warm room in the inn he had left behind him, but the power of self-action seemed to be taken from him, and he could only pursue, as the electric current does the wire, the phantom old man, whithersoever he led. Onward they went, up hill and down dale, for many a long mile, passing quite around the village in their course, until the blacksmith's steps grew weary, and he lagged toilsomely along. But it was not so with the old man — the further he went the more briskly he seemed to move, and when the great clock in the village struck midnight, he was, to all appearance, as brisk and lithesome as if he had first started.

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At this moment, too, Tawly observed that they were in front of a little, low-roofed cottage, from one window of which a bright light was shining. The house had a familiar look to him, but he could not at first realize, because he had come thither by such a roundabout road, that it was the home of his sweetheart, Kate. That it was, however, he was soon convinced, and, at a signal from the old man, he stood still.

Through the half-curtained window, where the light was gleaming, Tawly could see into the very room itself. It contained only a few pieces of furniture, including a small bookcase, filled with books, and on the walls hung a few pictures. Seated at a table, near the window, was Kate, engaged in writing. He could see that she was writing to him, and that tears dropped upon the paper as she wrote. In the letter she asked him to desert the evil ways into which he had fallen, and, for her sake, to return to his former life. She regretted, she said, that she had tempted him to visit the haunted house, and she would recall, if he would only desert the tap-room of "The Last but One," all she had said about not caring the snap of her finger for any one who had not slept therein. She referred, too, with such tenderness as only a woman can, to the pleasant hours they had passed together, in the summer months gone by, and wished that they, or at least some others like them, might again be theirs. She missed him, she continued, at the parties and the sleigh-rides, and she needed more than ever his strong arm to rest upon, and his kind voice to cheer her. She added that he must come to her, and be to her all that he was in the days gone by, and that she, for her part, would be once more his dear Kate.

Of course Tawly could not make this all out, as I have written it, but he knew by the expression of her face as she wrote, that some such thoughts were passing through her mind, and when afterward he came to read the letter he found that it was even thus.

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So engaged was Tawly in watching Kate, who, by the way, never looked more beautiful to his eyes than she did at this moment, that he thought nothing of the bitter cold and the piercing winds, and even forgot all about the phantom old man who had brought him thither. Indeed, when he did recall him to mind, and turned to look for him, he had vanished. The long road on either hand, with the moon shining brightly upon it, revealed no trace of him, nor could he discern, gazing over the broad fields which spread out on every side, any shadow resembling him. He was gone and had made no sign.

While Tawly was thus occupied in looking for the old man, Kate had folded her letter, and now, as if wearied and sorrowful, hid her face on her arms, resting on the table. Something resembling a sob reached Tawly's quick ears. He stole noiselessly to the entrance, which he once knew so well, and, opening the door, crept quietly in. In another moment he stood beside Kate, and, placing his hand on her rounded shoulder, uttered softly her name.

Without being startled, for she had been communing so long on paper with her lover, that it already had seemed to her that he must be present, she raised her head, and, looking in his eyes, answered.

It is scarcely worth while attempting to narrate their talk. Lovers, it is proverbial the world over, utter that which, if repeated, would sound extremely foolish. Nor was the talk of Tawly and Kate an exception to this rule. They chattered an immense deal of nonsense during the short time — for so it seemed to be to him — he remained with her, and he made all kinds of rash promises, which, however, unlike those that many a lover makes, he kept. It was not, however, until the early cock called the morning watch, and the eastern horizon showed a pale line of light, that Tawly kissed Kate good-bye, and wended his way homeward. He did not feel the cold now, and was no longer fatigued, but was in a healthful glow, and his mind was filled with all manner of pleasant thoughts.

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That day the villagers were surprised to find that Tawly had returned to his shop, and, when they saw him working away as lustily and merrily as in the old times, making the sparks fly briskly from the red-hot iron on his anvil, as his brawny arm wielded the sledge heavily upon it, they wondered how the change had been wrought; but the blacksmith kept his own counsel, and Kate kept hers, and none of the village gossips were ever the wiser in knowing of Tawly's walk with the phantom old man.

And so Tawly worked on industriously up to Christmas. Again, as of wont, the boys and girls used to gather about the doorway of the smithy, watching the coals on the forge glow and blaze under the blast from the rejuvenated bellows, enjoying the fiery shower that fell from the beaten iron bars on the anvils, and half frightened at their own changing shadows cast on the side of the house, opposite the open door where they were grouped. Horses once more came from far and near for new shoes. Even sturdy oxen, dragging heavy sleds, stopped at the smith's shop to be shod, and many a farm wagon and cart was left there to be repaired. The noise of the hammers on the anvil was heard all day. The bellows got bloated with wind, and when blown, used to send the fiery cinders flying all over the shop. The hot tongs, when plunged into the butts of water at the side of the forge, hissed more fiercely than ever, and Tawly himself whistled more loudly, and wiped the sweat from his face with his leathern apron oftener than he ever did before.

Kate, too, bending over her sewing in her own little room, sung more merrily to herself than she had in months previous. The bloom, too, which had begun to fade from her cheeks, returned, and her step grew lighter and her eyes brighter than they had been for many and many a month before. Every day she saw Tawly as she went by his shop, on her way to the post-office and the village store. It was, indeed, really surprising to note the number of

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times she was obliged to go into that neighborhood, and yet she never went thither but that Tawly knew, seemingly intuitively, of her approach. He could not always, however, speak to her as she passed by; but would have to content himself — especially when he was engaged in shoeing an unruly horse — by giving her a quiet nod, with his head bent down under the animal's body. Even such hasty glimpses as these added zest to his labor, and he would drive the nails through the hoof with a quickness and precision that must have been quite gratifying to the horse itself. Every night, though, he found his way to Kate's quiet home, and, though his former companions tried to tempt him to visit the "Last but One" again, he refused to accede to their wishes, and old Van Bust was heard to say that he thereby had lost one of his best customers.

Quickly the days which preceded Christmas passed by, and in all this time Tawly had seen nothing of the phantom old man, or had even so much as ventured near the haunted grounds. The house itself was as desolate-looking as ever, and not a footstep, since the first fall of snow, had visited it. For all that the villagers knew of it, it might have been located in the Polar regions. Only when an explorer like Tawly made his appearance, tracing out its deserted garden walks, and penetrating its hidden mysteries — and such explorers appeared only once in a life-time — did the good people of the village learn any thing concerning it. As it was, they got little information out of the blacksmith, who might as well have been, so far as they could learn any thing from him, like one of those Arctic navigators who never return to tell the story of their adventures.

Tawly had, however, while at work in his shop, often thought of the old house, and, though he had said nothing to Kate about it, who no longer referred to it, and had apparently forgotten that she had once made a vow not to marry any one who had not slept there, he was resolved to pass at least one night under its roof.

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It was Christmas Eve when Tawly, after taking a God-speed drink of hot-spiced ale at the "Last but One," set forth to go to the haunted house. He would much rather have turned his footsteps toward Kate's home on this night, but pride urged him the other way. As he went down the village street, the lights from many a window gleamed across his path, and the sounds of merry-making fell upon his ears. Afar off he saw the light burning in the window of Kate's cottage, and he knew that she was near it, and, perhaps, at that very moment watching for him.

As its slender rays gleamed through the frosty night air to where he stood, it seemed as if they were sent to guide him to her, and it was long before he could summon the resolution necessary to enable him to turn his steps toward the haunted house. When, however, he had said, as it were, good night to that light, and had turned his back upon it, he moved forward resolutely to his destination. The fierce wind blew in his face as he advanced, the cold pierced him through and through, and the pathway, which had before been smooth and made clear by the bright moonlight, now grew rough and was darkened by shadows of flying clouds. As he entered the haunted grounds the deep snow impeded his steps, and the trees cast denser shadows around him. The wind, too, howled angrily around him, the owls hooted at him, and the snow fell from the overarching branches upon him as he passed.

Tawly, approaching the house, heard the noise of falling chains and bolts withdrawn, and, as he picked his way cautiously up the dilapidated steps, the door swung slowly open on its rusted hinges, to admit him, and then, as he entered, closed violently behind him. Again, as on the first occasion of his visit, mysterious hands seized him — more than one pair, however, at this time, it seemed to him — and bore him along through the broad hall and up the wide stair-case, till he reached the door of the portrait room, which opened to admit him. A great light filled the

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apartment, and shone through the doorway where he stood. Before entering, however, he turned to look at his mysterious guides, but nothing bearing human forms could he discover. Flitting away in the distance, though, he discovered several pairs of what seemed to him to be hands, reminding him of the white wings of flying doves.

Advancing into the apartment, he found that the light proceeded from a large fire of wood burning on the open hearth. Such a cheerful look as it had, with its huge back-logs all red-hot and glowing, and its fore-sticks sputtering and blazing away, sending broad sheets of flame up the wide-mouthed chimney, and filling the room with warmth and light, was, to the chilled and dispirited blacksmith, most cheering, and gave renewed courage and comfort to his heart. His first glance told him that the room was unoccupied, though two chairs were drawn up before the fire, as if they were awaiting the arrival of occupants. Into one of these Tawly seated himself—enjoying the glowing fire and engaged in looking about the room. The portraits were on the walls as usual, even the portrait of the old man was in its place, and all looked as stiff and old-fashioned as ever. It seemed to Tawly, as he gazed at the strange old man, that, ever and anon, he would move his head slowly from side to side, open and close his eyes, and sometimes smile. Lest this might be the effect of the firelight, as the blaze rose and fell, casting strange shadows on the walls and ceilings, the blacksmith left his chair and went to examine it more closely. As he approached it, he was surprised to see that it receded, seeming to sink through the wall of the apartment, while the oak panel beside it slid into the opening.

When Tawly recovered from the surprise incident to this occurrence, he essayed to move the panel, but it resisted all his efforts. It was, apparently, as firm in its position as if it had occupied its present place undisturbed since the house was built. He wondered not a little at this strange

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incident; but possessing something of a philosophical disposition, was not materially disturbed by it. He had come there to pass the night, and he was resolved to accomplish this, even if all the portraits on the wall should disappear.

Reseating himself in his chair, he watched the blazing wood fire, and allowed his thoughts to wander to Kate, who, he doubted not, was anxiously expecting him.

"She will be disappointed, though, poor girl," he said to himself, "and will seek her bed, fearing that I have forsaken her for the spiced ale I was wont to find so enticing in Van Bust's tavern. I will go to her early in the morning, though, and tell her where I have been, and all that I have witnessed.

Whether the old man of the portrait laid a charm upon him, or whether the heat of the fire made him drowsy, he could not tell, but it was not a great while before he fell asleep. How long he had slept, when he was awakened by the sound of music and laughter, he could not tell; but, on opening his eyes, something almost fairy-like in its beauty presented itself to his gaze. The old room, with its plain oak paneling and antique portraits, was converted into a hall of boundless proportions. From the ceiling, which was upheld by richly carved columns, wound with wreaths of evergreen, hung branches of holly and mistletoe. All around were groups of persons, clad in holiday suits, making merry, and laughing, and dancing together. Prominent among them was the figure of the old man of the portrait. Approaching the blacksmith, he took the unoccupied chair at his side—for, strange enough, Tawly found that he was still seated before the blazing wood fire — and, turning his twinkling eyes upon him, spoke.

"Young man," he said, "you are the first mortal who, for many years, has visited this house. You have come, too, at a time when, calling my trusty almoners about me, I hold my court this only night of all the year. These forms — which seem to you to be real, although they are

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not — here assembled, are of almost every nation of the world, and have been brought here to receive from me, the patron saint of Christendom, gifts, which they will bear home with them, for those good and obedient children, of whom they have the care and keeping. Ever since last Christmas have my messengers—the swift-winged swallows that inhabit the chimneys of this house, and visit foreign lands; the more home-like pigeons who go from city to city; the vigilant crows, flying from farm-house to farm-house throughout the land, and the bright-eyed larks, twittering about the eaves and looking into the chamber windows of all quiet village homes — been bringing to me reports of where my presents ought to go. Already are these almoners of mine appropriately portioned, and, when the midnight bell rings in Christmas Day, they will vanish from sight; and when the sun awakes them in the morn, they will remember this scene only as if it were a dream which came to them in the night. I have but a few more words to say. Stay not in this place all night — no good would come of it. This is my home, and I would live here alone and undisturbed. I am SANTA CLAUS."

At this moment the bell in the belfry of the village church rung the first stroke for midnight, and, in an instant, the old saint disappeared; the scene, with all its gayeties vanished; the fire went out; and Tawly found himself in darkness. He rose and groped about him. One hand touched the long arm of his bellows, and the other fell upon the cold steel of his anvil. But he still heard the notes of the Christmas bell filling the air, and the sound of music and laughter, afar off, though, and faint, yet reached his ears. The stars were gleaming in the sky, and the late moon yet shining, as he passed into the street, and took his way, with quick steps, towards Kate's home. She was still watching at her window for his coming, and greeted him with joyfulness when he arrived. She listened to his wondrous tale, and only said, when he had finished

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it, that she had little doubts but that this, as well as his former adventures in the haunted house, were simply dreams — the result, she feared, of too much hot-spiced ale at the "Last but One," and that henceforth, to prevent any further occurrences of this nature, she should take him under her own protection ; and that, when she had become his wife, she knew he would give up Van Bust and the "Last but One" for her sake.

For her sake, he said, he would ; but he declared that he had tasted no more than one mug of hot-spiced ale that afternoon, and that, he felt certain, could not have made him dream the dreams and see the visions which he had known that eve.

Tawly lived to see many Christmas Eves with Kate, his wife, after this, but nothing could ever convince him that he had not witnessed and participated in every thing herein written regarding the haunted house, which still stands, a little aside from the busy streets of the village, as mossy, as deserted, and as haunted as ever.

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CHAPTER XXXIV.

JEANNIE'S WEDDING.

THE morning of Jeannie's wedding-day rose clear and cold, and the snow-birds, that all through the winter had gone to her chamber window to be fed their breakfast of crumbs, hopped about as merrily as ever, unconscious that the open hands which scattered their daily food to them, were feeding them for the last time. Jeannie, though, had more regrets at leaving these little pensioners of her bounty, than she had, I think, in leaving me to only the tender care of my wife. "Who," she asked, as she took her seat at the breakfast-table, that morning, "will take care of my birds when I am away?"

Of course every one at the table, except myself, promised to do so; but I could see that Jeannie placed little confidence in their promises, and drew a little sigh while tears came to her eyes, as if she thought it was very wrong for her to go away and leave them. I really believe that if I had not told her that there were plenty of cedar berries in the woods for them to live on, and that St. Valentine's Day would soon be here, when they — as she herself was about to do — would mate and fly away of their own accord, she would have thought it her duty to remain at Woodbine to give these winter birds their breakfast.

Frank said "pshaw!" to this, when I told him of it on our way to church; but, for all that, Frank had a very narrow escape from remaining a bachelor. My wife said, as we sat together that evening in the library, talking over the wedding, that it was the thought of parting with us

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and the children, and not the birds, that made Jeannie feel so sadly. Perhaps it was, though why any one should feel sadly on their wedding-day is more than I can understand.

"Oh, you men," said my wife, in reply, "cannot understand a great many things in woman. She has more chords to her heart than you have, and they vibrate to the lightest touch. The bride who leaves her home — and I am thankful that Jeannie had a true home with us — to share the fortune and the home of another, has — no matter how fondly she may love, nor how much confidence she may have in her lover — fears and doubts as to the future, which even her own heart cannot fully comprehend. The ribbon which lightly bound the tresses of her hair no longer serves her; the coquettish apron, with its dainty pockets into which she used to thrust her plump hands, is cast aside; the silken sash which was wound about her virgin waist is folded up and put away, and all her pretty, girlish ways give place to sober, wifely manners."

"But this ought not to be," I said; "she should still retain the ways of girlhood, and then she would continue to be to her husband just what she was during their courtship days."

"Nay, not so," she replied; "when she becomes a wife, she assumes new duties, and her bearing should be in keeping with them. She is no longer a maiden, fancy free, but a woman with the duties, the responsibilities, the desires and hopes of a wife. Jeannie will not return to us the same being she was this morning before she went to church."

"My dear," I said, "let us change the subject. I am growing quite mournful and can only be coaxed into cheerfulness with another slice of Jeannie's wedding-cake. Jeannie behaved well though, at the altar, did n't she? not a tear dimmed her eyes, and her voice faltered only just the least trifle."

"And how lovely she looked," said my wife, wiping a

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tear from one corner of her eye with an embroidered handkerchief which Frank had presented to her.

"Oh, she always did look that," I said, pouring myself out a glass of wine; "here's health and happiness to her in the future."

"That is the, I don't know how many-eth time, you have drank that toast to-day: please don't do it again to-night," my wife said.

"What!" I exclaimed, "debar me from drinking to Jeannie's health and happiness!"

"Yes," said my wife, "unless you will do it in cold water."

"My dear," I said, utterly ignoring her cold water prescription, "I wish you would tell me exactly how Jeannie was dressed, for you know I may be asked by some one of her young lady friends, who was not present at the wedding, and I would like to be able to answer satisfactorily."

Thereupon my wife said, "of course," and went into an elaborate description of which I can only recall the words, white silk, scalloped, bordered, satined, flounced, laced, train, veil, bouquet, pearls and plain gold ring; and, truly, that seems to me all that it is necessary to say. Any young lady can, doubtless, correctly fill up the hiatus.

For the honor of my sex, I am pleased to say, that Frank performed his part of the ceremony in a perfectly correct and unabashed manner. He had no trouble in finding the ring, and there was no delay or difficulty experienced in placing it upon the bride's finger. There were three bridesmaids — lovely girls, dressed in — well, in very pretty frocks.

My wife says "frocks" is n't exactly the word I should use, so I suggested gowns, but she says that is no improvement; therefore I mention silken attire, sheeny robes, becoming dresses. But none of these appear to answer, and my wife only smiles, and shakes her head. Consequently, I am at a stand-still, and will not attempt to say any thing more about them.

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Many of Frank's friends, magnificent in white waistcoats and neck-ties, and swallow-tailed coats, from town, were present, and the village church "wore," as my wife remarked, "quite a gay and fashionable appearance."

As we passed out of church, after all was over, and Frank's wife appeared leaning on his arm, smiling joyfully, her Sunday-school scholars scattered flowers before her, on the path leading to the carriage, which made Jeannie cry, and she fairly stooped down and kissed, through her tears, the little beggars, one by one. Perhaps she thought that these hot-house flowers had been gathered by the children, along the road-side on their way to the church. If she did think so she was greatly mistaken, and my wife says it was a piece of extravagance on my part for which I ought to be ashamed; — as if I could commit such a folly, — but, as I promised Frank to keep this a secret, I cannot, of course, reveal the truth to my wife. The number of children's shoes and stockings, to say nothing of silk dresses, sets of furs, sleigh-rides, and dinners without number, that my wife will quietly cast into my face on account of those flowers, would, if I did n't know my own innocence, and was n't the most reasonable husband in the world, make me angry; but I can afford to laugh in my sleeve at the dear woman, and, after a while, when Frank returns, he 'll reveal the truth to her.

After the marriage, the bridal party celebrated the wedding at Woodbine, when the cakes were cut, wines sparkled and flowed, and merriment, for an hour or two, held high carnival.

Then the sunshine faded from our sight, the bright eyes grew dim, and the merry laughter and loving voices of our dear ones died away into the distance. And my wife and I sat together in the library, and recalled to mind our own wedding-day, and the memory of it was so sweet that it filled the room like unto a priceless perfume.

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CHAPTER XXXV.

SEEING THE OLD YEAR OUT.

WE watched the old year go out — my wife and I alone together. Now, nothing can be better, in the country, than watching the departure of the old year, except seeing the new one come in. I am half-disposed to think that the old year would be disappointed, and might refuse to go, if my good wife and myself neglected to sit up and await his departure. Twenty times have we two, seated side by side before a blazing fire, watched the old year, wrapping his tattered robes around his bent form, pass forever from our sight into midnight and darkness. Only once, in all these years, did he leave us in tears. That was when the form of our eldest-born lay cold and still on his little couch. Of course, the remembrance of our dead child comes freshly to our minds on these last nights of the years; but each time bringing more subdued and tender memories. Other children have come to us since then, but I think none has ever been able to quite fill the place in my wife's heart which our first little one left vacant. The pretty dresses which he wore during the few months he was ours, still are kept in the locked drawers, where my wife placed them after his death. Neither of the other children has ever worn them, and I do not think, as I recall to mind the insertings and laces which adorned them, that those made in later years were so costly.

I have often thought when, as she always does on this last night of the year, I see my wife bring forth these

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precious garments, grown yellow with age, and spreading them out on the chair beside her, gaze with tearful eyes upon them, her heart filled with the memory of that blessed babe, that, if he had lived until now, he would be nearly a man; but I never say this to my wife, and I am sure it never occurs to her that it would be so. The other children grow up, and, leaving their babehood behind them, become boys and girls, and, she thinks, will some day grow to be men and women, and, possibly, get married; but our first-born can never be any thing else to her than an infant. I am very glad for my wife's sake, that we have this dead babe in heaven. I believe she finds great comfort in thinking about him, and in examining his little wardrobe. I don't think, either, that, so long as she keeps the remembrance of this babe in her heart, she will ever grow old. She may live to be a grandmother, it is true; but she will never cease, in her own mind, to be the young mother of so many years ago.

"Did it ever occur to you, my dear," I said to my wife, as, with a sigh, a smile, and a tear, she unfolded these reminders of our lost hope, "that it is better to have one babe in heaven than many children upon earth?"

She replied that it never had, and that, moreover, she did not think I was correct.

"Human nature," she continued, "and especially that which mothers possess, cannot readily reconcile itself to the loss of children. It is well, I know, to have a babe in heaven; but — and it may be selfish in me to feel so — I would rather that my children would live with me on earth than have them taken from me by death."

"It is but natural," I said, "to feel thus, though what these little ones who are taken from us would have been, had they lived, we cannot tell; and we can but trust that Heaven had good reasons for taking them away."

"Yes," she replied, placing her hand in mine, "and, though every one of our children should be taken from us,

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I trust we shall be able to say, 'The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord.'"

Then in low and quiet tones we talked to each other of the joys and sorrows which had been ours in the year passing away, and recalled more of pleasantness than grief in its journeying. We needed not to go out of our own family circle for subjects on which to converse; for births and marriages, the departure for distant lands and return home, after years of absence, of various members of our family, had transpired since the old year came in. To those who were absent and to those who were home again; to the married and to the single; to the young and to the old, did my wife and myself allude in gentle terms; and, as the old clock in the corner struck the hour of twelve, I filled, with rare old wine, our two glasses, and we drank to all those whom we loved on earth, and to the memory of those in heaven.

And so the old year went out, sweeping up its scattered crumbs of cake and draining its mugs of ale; and the new one came in, bearing in its open hands freshly frosted cakes, and foaming tankards of a generous brew.

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CHAPTER XXXVI.

NEW-YEAR'S DAY.

THE difference between New-Year's Day in the city and the same day in the country is very great. When I lived in town I used to make many calls on this day; and, when a young man, I thought little of accomplishing a hundred calls on this anniversary; but, as years rolled over my head, the number gradually decreased, until, of latter years, scarcely a dozen names remained upon my calling list. Now that I have become a countryman, even this number is abbreviated, and I can enumerate on the fingers of one hand the names of all the friends I care to call upon. On New-Year's Day, therefore, I remained at home the greater part of the time, and, although we had boned turkey and pickled oysters on the table, ready for any hungry visitor who might call, the children, I am happy to say, got the larger portion of them. My wife seemed to enjoy the quietude of the day exceedingly, and, in the morning, assisted me in selecting from my collection a couple of shelves-full of new books to add to the children's library. In the afternoon I made my four calls, and came home to an early dinner, not in the least elated by the few glasses of lemonade and cups of coffee I had taken.

"Now, nothing can be better," I said to my wife, "than lemonade and coffee — except" — and here I glanced mysteriously around, "except," I repeated, "cakes and ale."

My wife, however, said that she was not certain about it. "You have such strange notions," she continued, "and you

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make such queer remarks occasionally, that I do not always understand whether you are in earnest as to what you say, or if you be joking."

"I am in earnest, now, my dear," I said very solemnly.

My wife, however, was quite at sixes and sevens in the matter.

When evening came the little ones reminded me of my promise, made on Christmas, to tell them a story; and, as they had been good children during the week, after we assembled in the library I complied with their request.

During Christmas week, I had read aloud to them a story entitled, "A Christmas Talk with Young People," that greatly pleased them, and the question asked in it by "Tootie," as to where Santa Claus lived, was, because the writer failed to give any satisfactory answer, also asked by my own little ones.

I told them at the time that the question was a knotty one, and that if such learned men as the author[1] himself, the "President of the St. Nicholas Society," a "Dutch bookseller," and "another person," whoever he may be, were unable, after due thought and, probably, careful research among musty tomes, to tell any thing about it, they could scarcely expect that such a simple-minded man as their papa, who had never been able to learn the geographical position of many countries, to say nothing of towns and villages, and who did n't know a single word of high or low Dutch — unless lager belong to one or the other of these tongues — could answer, at a moment's notice, this perplexing question.

Indeed, too, I told them that I should not feel equal to attempting to unravel it until I had taken time for consideration; but that I might possibly get an idea or two into my head about it, between then and New-Year's Day, and if so, they should hear about it on that evening.

Therefore it was that I had scarcely taken a bite of my

[1] James T. Brady, Esq.

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New-Year's cake, or scalded my mouth with the tea which we were having in the library, when Em, who, because she was the eldest of the three children, was appointed spokesman for the occasion, gave me to understand that she and all the little ones had been waiting a good half-hour for me to come in from my cigar, and tell them where Santa Claus lived.

"Now, if I attempt to solve this problem for you, little ones," I said, "I wish you to promise that you will not send word to 'Tootie,' or 'Jim,' or 'Anne' that you know — at least not until I get the story copyrighted, and then you can tell just as fast as you like. Besides," I continued, "I am not certain that I am correct. As yet, it is a mere supposition of mine — very much like what America was to Columbus before he actually discovered it. There will be plenty of people, too, who will say 'Oh, pshaw!' to it, and ask 'How does he know, I'd like to be informed?' — so that it will be just as well to keep it to ourselves, and let me go on exploring the matter quietly until some morning I wake up and put my finger right down on the very spot where Santa Claus lives all the year round."

The little ones consenting to all this, I went on: "You must know, my dears, that, quite a number of years ago — before either one of you had hung up a stocking, and, in fact, possessed any feet to put into stockings, letting alone the finding of candies or any thing else in them — that your papa, one very cold winter day, found himself — though that is scarcely the proper expression to use, for neither your papa or any one else could, I think, find himself, unless he first had lost himself, which, unless he was out of his head or something dreadful in the way of intoxicating drinks had overtaken him, could scarcely be, you know; so I believe I shall have to commence again. You must know, then, my dears, that, quite a number of years ago — how many I am not disposed to remember — your papa — now let 's get the proper word, don't hurry me — your

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papa was invited to the house of some dear friends, who lived way off from New-York, and almost every other place, in a wild spot called Canaan — not the Canaan of which you read in the good Book, but one quite different, and where milk and honey do not habitually flow, although it is pretty well off in the matter of maple sap and sugar in the spring-time. The house itself was a large, rambling sort of a building, with a wide hall, and rooms everywhere in it, and a lawn, all covered with snow, creeping gradually down to the gate at the road-side, and with a number of large elm-trees, leafless, but with plenty of branches swaying to and fro in the wintry air, surrounding it. Some of you, perhaps, may have heard of that house and its neighborhood, for the place was known as 'Queechey.' Ah! I perceive mamma and aunty there have read the book which records the doings in that old house. But don't interrupt me. It was early in the evening when I arrived there, and, after eating apples, cracking nuts, and drinking cider with my friends — it ought to have been ale, but cider will occasionally do for a change — until a late hour of the night, I expressed a desire to go to bed. By the by, nothing can be better in the country than a bed — a feather-bed. A hair mattress is the proper thing in the city; but when you get into the country, it must give place to a feather-bed.

"Now, I have noticed, though I don't know why it is, that the 'spare rooms' in country-houses are generally the coldest in winter and the hottest ones in summer. Nor was the room I occupied on this occasion an exception. It was in the northest corner of the house, and the way the wind whistled and shrieked and howled and yelled around that corner, shaking the four windows of the room almost to pieces in its efforts to get in, would have made such little girls as any one of you are, nearly frantic. There was a big wood fire on the chimney hearth of that room; but, bless me, it had no more influence in warming the temperature of its atmosphere than if it had been kindled

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out of doors. The only merit it possessed was in the light it shed upon the old-fashioned furniture, and the queer shadows it cast upon the walls and ceiling. I lay in bed and watched that fire — for I was n't in the least disposed to be sleepy — as it rolled in great waves of flame up the chimney, and, ever and anon, as a fresh blast of wind broke against the side of the house, and went tumbling over the roof, and sucking, with its powerful lips, about the gaping-mouthed chimneys, an avalanche of sparks and coals would pass, swirling and whirling, upward out of sight, until every pinch of ashes and coal of fire had disappeared, and nothing was left but a red-hot hearth and back-stone, which seemed to glower angrily out upon me. It must have been a rare sight for midnight travellers, urging weary beasts through the drifting snow, and fighting, under buffalo robes, the fierce wind and piercing cold, to have seen the fire pouring forth from that chimney, and borne, like red flakes of snow, hissing and sputtering into the neighboring wood. It must have suggested to them the thought of warmth and comfort; but, as I before said, except for the cheering sight the fire afforded, there was really little difference between out and in doors.

"I lay a long time after the fire had all disappeared up the chimney, watching the glowing backpiece, and curiously observing the process of cooling as it went on. It commenced at the edges, and the white heat would grow red, and then slowly fade away, the black of the chimney closely following it up. It was like sin overtaking innocence by stealing into, and creeping noiselessly, but surely, through the chambers of the heart.

"I must have been lying thus, wakeful and listening to the roaring of the wind, the rattling of the sash, and the slamming of a distant window-blind, for at least an hour. I was, perhaps, beginning to get a little drowsy, for I was buried deep in the middle of a feather-bed, and over me was piled an immense mountain of quilts and blankets, so

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that only the tip of my innocent nose, which rose above it, and my two eyes, which shone, I am sure, like twin stars in a cold, clear night, could alone have been seen of all your dear papa. Don't laugh, children; listen to what I am saying, for we are now coming to the most interesting part of my story."

"Oh! now comes the time when you went to sleep, papa, of course," interrupted Miss Em.

"Not a bit of it," I replied; "I was just as wide awake as you are now. I remember I heard the pitcher, that was placed on the hearth to keep the water from freezing, click two or three times as the ice formed within it, and I also recall the fact that, every few minutes, I would remove the little icebergs that formed on the bed-clothes, just above my mouth, from my breath, which was condensed and frozen as fast as it left my lips. I also brushed the snow, which sifted through the window-sash, from above the bridge of my nose, where it was apparently determined to erect an opposition bridge between my eyebrows. Just then there came a lull in the wind, and I distinctly heard a scraping sound in the chimney, as if some one was sliding down it. I lifted my head up out of the blankets, and, looking over the side of the bed at the fireplace, saw the last faint gleam on the back-plate disappear, as a figure passed between it and my sight. The next moment I perceived, by the dim light of the lamp which stood in one corner of the room, that it was a jolly-looking old man with a long white beard, dressed in fur, and holding a pipe in his mouth. I immediately recognized him as Santa Claus, and, therefore, I raised myself up in bed on one elbow, and said, 'Good evening, Mr. Santa Claus.'

"'Good evening, Mr. Gray,' he replied.

"'Take a seat,' I said.

"And he took a place on the side of the bed, quite close to me, so that I had a good view of his cheery old face.

"'Pardon me, pray, for dropping in so unceremoniously

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upon you,' he continued; 'but I chanced to be passing by, and that wide-mouthed chimney of yours looked so inviting, and had such a cheerful glow about it, that I could n't resist making its descent.'

"'Don't apologize,' I said, 'I am only too happy to see you. Pray make yourself at home.'

"'Thank you, thank you,' he cried; 'the fact is, I was out reconnoitering chimneys to-night, it being near to Christmas. I thought it would be well to look out for the wide chimneys. Nothing can be better than a capacious chimney, and this is a splendid one for my purpose. I wish the city chimneys were modeled on this plan; they are growing narrower and narrower every year. I am afraid they will be the death of me some night. I have been half-inclined to give up city chimneys entirely, and devote the remaining years of my life to those of the country. When the city folks first began to talk about Christmas trees, and introduced them into their nurseries, it nearly broke my heart; for I feared that my occupation, like the colored gentleman's of the play, was gone. But I don't mind it so much now, and all on account of the chimneys.'

"'Ah!' I exclaimed.

"'Yes,' he continued, 'the little boys and girls of the cities will have to give me up by and by; but I 'll stick to the children of the country just so long as they continue to be good, and the chimneys don't get the bronchitis in their throats. Allow me,' he continued, removing, as he spoke, a pile of icebergs from the quilt. 'You find this rather a cool room for sleeping in, do you not?'

"'Yes,' I replied, 'quite so.'

"'It has long been a favorite room of mine,' he continued; 'it has a fine northern exposure, and such a chimney!'

"'I am afraid,' I said, making a move to get out of bed, 'that I have unwittingly invaded your premises.'

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"'Oh! bless you! no,' he said: 'lie still, don't disturb yourself. This is a sort of lounging place where I come occasionally to smoke my pipe — that's all;' and he puffed a great wreath of smoke out into the room, which circled a moment around the bed and then passed up the chimney.

"'Indeed!' I cried.

"'Yes,' he continued, 'mine habitation is a little farther north. It is an old rambling, scrambling country-house, full of nooks and corners and gables, and crowded all over the roof with every fashion and style of wide chimneys. Indeed, my chief amusement consists in going up and down them. The summer season is my hardest time, although I sit most of that period in the orchard, under the shade of trees, in my shirt-sleeves, and drink all manner of cooling drinks. Then I have my messengers, who come on every breath of wind that stirs, from every portion of the Christian world, and bring me reports of the names and residences of all good little boys and girls who hang up their stockings on Christmas Eves, and believe in me and not in Christmas-trees. Oh! I manage to get along pretty well. I have Christmas dinners every day throughout the year, and plum-puddings and mince-pies — turkeys and rounds of beef are every-day affairs to me. I used to live a little better, I confess, in what are called the "good old times;" but then I was younger than I am now, and my stomach was stronger, and I could drink any number of wassail bowls of spiced ale, with roasted crabs floating therein, without feeling it, and eat a whole boar at one sitting without a symptom of indigestion. But, bless me,' he continued, 'how time flies in your company! It must be near cock-crow, and I've a long journey to take before I get home.'

"And the old saint rose from the side of my bed, and, taking my hand, said, as he shook it warmly, 'Come and see me, my boy, some of these days, and I'll brew a was-

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sail bowl for you which will warm the inmost cockles of your heart.'

"'Thank you,' I answered; 'but where do you live?'

"'Oh, bless you!' he said, 'go straight ahead, and you can't miss it; though, to be sure, it is n't down on any map or chart, and there are no railroads or telegraph lines running near it, only a disused turnpike, over which, once in a long while, a superannuated stage-coach creeps rattling along, with one or two drowsy passengers nestled within, and a crusty old driver on the box, who is always asleep, except when he stops at my gate to water his horses. Then he gets down from his seat, and brings me a bundle of weekly newspapers, and, after watering his team from the old roadside-well with a long sweep and a moss-covered bucket, he climbs back to his place, and drives slowly onward.'

"'Perhaps, then,' I said, 'I can get him to take me to your place?'

"'Perhaps,' he answered; 'but you'll have to watch your chance, and find out when he is going. He is an independent line, and, as he drives his own stage, he goes and comes only at his own pleasure; sometimes twice a month — sometimes but once in two months. He is good company, though, when not asleep, for he is acquainted with the history of all the wide-chimney farm-houses on the road, and the names of all the little boys and girls who have lived therein for generations past. His stage-office is at'—

"Here a blind blew to with a slam; so that I failed to catch the word he uttered.

"'Where?' I eagerly asked.

"'At'—

"The blind this time blew outward, and with even a louder noise than before, so that I entirely lost the sound of the word."

"How provoking!" exclaimed Miss Em.

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"Was n't it?" I said. "But I was not to be deterred by this. So I again asked, 'Where did you say?'

"'Are you deaf?' Santa Claus asked.

"'No,' I rejoined, 'but that confounded shutter slams and bangs so that I can't hear your words.'

"'Well,' he replied, I thought a little testily, 'I'll repeat it once more, but not again; so open your ears. He lives at'—

"Again I failed to hear it, for, just at that moment, as if the house was coming down, every window-sash in the room rattled fearfully; the shutters played to and fro like shuttlecocks; the old trees outside creaked and groaned in a horrid manner; and a mammoth chanticleer in the barn crowed so long and lustily that Santa Claus, thinking morning had come, waved his hand to me farewell, and, before I could prevent him, flew up the chimney 'like the down of a thistle.'

"I sprang out of bed, and looked from the window: the sun was risen, and the snow, glistening under its rays, lay in strange, fantastic forms upon the earth, but no trace could I find of the good old saint, and, strange to say, there was little or no wind stirring, though the air was as cold and keen as a razor. As I turned to get into bed again, I observed that one of the 'farm hands' was kneeling before the empty fireplace engaged in making a fire, and that beside him appeared a pile of wood which he had just cast upon the floor."

"Oh, it was the sound of that wood falling on the floor, papa," said Willie, "that woke you, and which you thought was the slamming of the shutters."

"It may be," I answered, "that I had been asleep and dreaming, but it will take a great deal to convince me that this was the case. I do not yet despair of one day coming across that sleepy old coachman, and getting him to drive me to the exact place where Santa Claus lives."

When I had concluded my story, and was congratulating

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myself with having satisfactorily answered their question, the little ones quite surprised me by saying that, though the story was a very nice one, I had n't told them in it where Santa Claus lived.

"I am quite certain," I replied, "that I gave you a very good account of his residence; but I see you were all asleep when I told that part of it, and, as I perceive you are the sleepiest little people I have met in a long time, I would advise you to say 'good-night' to mamma, and papa and go to bed, so as to get a good start in growing with the new year."

Thus ended our New-year's Night, and with its going disappeared the last morsel of our cakes, and the final drops from our mugs of ale. All the year round these had occupied places on our festive board, filling our plates with plenty and crowning our goblets with creamy foam. And, though in the coming year fresh cakes may be baked and broken, and new ale brewed and broached, yet we will not forget the joys and pleasures of the past, with its bounteous store of precious CAKES AND ALE.

THE END.

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